TOILERS OF THE TRAILS

GEORGE MARSH

ON CAME THE STRANGE PAIR

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BY

GEORGE MARSH

ILLUSTRATED BY

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THE OLD CANOE

My seams gape wide, so I'm tossed aside
To rot on a lonely shore
While the leaves and mould like a shroud enfold,
For the last of my trails are o'er;
But I float in dreams on Northland streams
That never again I'll see,
As I lie on the marge of the old portage
With grief for company.

When the sunset gilds the timbered hills
That guard Timagami,
And the moonbeams play on far James Bay
By the brink of the frozen sea,
In phantom guise my spirit flies
As the dream-blades dip and swing
Where the waters flow from the Long Ago
In the spell of the beck'ning spring.

Do the cow-moose call on the Montreal
When the first frost bites the air,
And the mists unfold from the red and gold
That the autumn ridges wear?
When the white falls roar as they did of yore
On the Lady Evelyn,
Do the square-tail leap from the black pools deep
Where the pictured rocks begin?

Oh! the fur-fleets sing on Timiskaming
As the ashen paddles bend,
And the crews carouse at Rupert House
At the sullen winter's end;
But my days are done where the lean wolves run
And I ripple no more the path
Where the gray geese race 'cross the red moon's face
From the white wind's Arctic wrath.

Tho' the death-fraught way from the Saguenay
To the storied Nipigon
Once knew me well, now a crumbling shell
I watch the years roll on,
While in memory's haze I live the days
That forever are gone from me,
As I rot on the marge of the old portage
With grief for company.

—George Marsh.

FOR THE GREAT FATHER

FOR THE GREAT FATHER

At Half-Way-House, far over the Height-of-Land on the James Bay watershed, the bitter December wind drove around the whitewashed log buildings in swirls of powdery snow. In the post clearing outside the dog-stockade the tepees of Crees in for the Christmas trade stood deep in drifts. Around the roaring stove in the trade-house lounged a group of red trappers filling the long room with smoke as they gloomily discussed in Cree the news brought by the freshly arrived winter mail-team from the southern posts. Behind the huge slab trade-counter sat Nicholson, the factor, and his clerk buried in papers, weeks old, blazoned with accounts of the world war raging since August; for mail from outside came but twice a year to Half-Way-House, marooned in the wilderness of Rupert Land.

Presently the yelping of huskies announced the arrival of another team. Dog-bells jingled in front of the building. The low guttural of the Crees about the stove ceased as heads turned to inspect the newcomer. Then the door of the trade-house opened, admitting a tall figure crusted with snow from moccasins to hood.

"Quey! Quey!" came the greetings from the loungers, for the voyageur was well known at Half-Way-House.

"Quey! Quey!" he threw out as he strode to the counter.

"Hello, Joe! I didn't expect to see you till spring!"

The factor turned from his paper to shake hands over the counter with the tall trapper.

"I thought you said you were going to winter in the Sinking Lake country and wouldn't get in for Christmas?"

"I cum from de Sinkeen Lak' in seex sleep; I got nice fur for you."

"Nice fur, eh? Black fox?"

"Tree of dem," said the Cree, his small black eyes snapping with pride. The loungers who had moved to the counter to shake hands with the voyageur and hear the talk, grunted in surprise.

"Too bad! Too bad, Joe!" The factor shook his head. "We've sad news from Quebec. War across the Big Water! Nobody buys fur! Prices all gone to smash!"

The dark face of the Indian changed with disappointment.

"How? What you spik?"

"The Great Father in England fights the Germans," explained the factor. "Mail-team just in with new prices for the Company posts. I'm sorry, Joe, I can't allow you much on your skins."

"I got plentee marten an' feesher-cat," the Indian muttered in his chagrin.

"Too bad, furs all gone down; bad times for the Company, bad for the Injun."

"A-hah!" The dazed Cree sighed, thinking of the rich fur pack outside on his sled and the long days he had toiled for it on his trap-lines in distant ice-locked valleys.

"What you geeve now for black fox?"

"Can't give you half last year's price; nobody buys 'em; they've all gone to war. Canada sends soldiers too, to fight for the King, the Great Father, across the Big Water."

"A-hah!" The tall trapper listened in amazement. Then he asked:

"How long dees fight las'?"

"No one knows, Joe. It's the worst war the world has seen and it may last a long time. The Big English Chief says three years."

"Fur no good w'ile de fight las'?"

"No, fur won't be worth much for some time."

"A-hah!" The Cree sighed heavily and went out to look after his dogs.

For two days Joe Lecroix—although a full-blooded Cree, his family had acquired the French name generations before—listened silently to the lamentation of the trappers at Half-Way-House. It was destined to be a sad Christmas indeed for those who had journeyed from their winter camps for the revel that the Great Company annually provides for its children of the snows. And long before the trails went soft in April there would be many a tepee in Rupert Land that had not known flour or tea in moons.

But Joe Lecroix did not trade his black fox and marten skins. While the Crees smoked, mourning

over the hard times, his active mind was busy. He had long credit at the post; in fact, had never been in debt since he swung out for himself as a youth, and so could hold his fur.

One morning he drove his team of half-breed Ungava huskies, loaded with his outfit and fur pack, up to the trade-house. Entering the store he asked for provisions for three weeks.

"What, Joe, you ain't goin' back before Christmas?" asked Nicholson in surprise.

"No, I travel sout'. No good hunt fur dees long snows," answered the Indian dryly.

"South? What do you mean?"

"Fur too cheap! I got no woman to feed. I t'ink I go to Kebec and see de sojer."

"Why, you're crazy, man!" cried the amazed factor. "It's four hundred miles to the Transcontinental at Weymontechene and it's the same back. They don't want Injuns; they won't take you."

The Cree straightened to his six feet, squaring his wide shoulders. His eyes glittered angrily as he broke into his native tongue.

"You say they ask for young men in Quebec to fight for the Big Chief. You say they will not take me, Joe Lecroix, to fight over the Big Water? Because my skin is dark, can I not fight? Where will you find at the posts of the Great Company any who shoots the running caribou so far as Joe Lecroix? Is there a dog-runner at Rupert House, at Whale River, at Mistissini, at the post by the Fading Waters, who can take the trail from Joe Lecroix?

What Company packer carries four bags of flour over the Devil's Portage on the Nottaway without rest? You saw Joe Lecroix do it two summers ago. Has any canoe man in Rupert Land run the Chutes of Death on the Harricanaw and lived? One! That one was Joe Lecroix. You say the white men will not take Joe Lecroix to fight across the Big Water because he has a skin like the red cedar. I will go to their camps and ask them."

The deep chest of the Cree rose and fell rapidly, his face set hard as his small eyes fiercely held Nicholson's gaze.

"It ain't that, Joe. All you say is dead truth, my lad. You're as stout as a moose and the best white-water man I've ever seen. It ain't that you ain't as able a man as travels the north country. It's just that they haven't enlisted Indians and may not intend to. I can't tell, and it's a long journey south, a long trail and a hard one. It would be tough if they wouldn't take you. Eight weeks on the trail with the dogs for nothing. It's safer to stick to the traps, Joe."

"I go and fin' out." And no advice of Nicholson could turn the stubborn Cree from his purpose.

When his provision bags were lashed on his sled, there was a handshake all around and a babel of Bo'-jo's from the Indians gathered to speed the mad trapper who was taking a four-hundred-mile trail in midwinter for the chance of getting himself killed in the great fight across the Big Water.

The last to wring the voyageur's hand was Nicholson, who said:

"Take good care of yourself, Joe. Half-Way-House can't afford to lose its best hunter. If you enlist we'll expect to hear from you by the spring canoe or the winter packet at least. Good-bye and good luck!"

"Bo'-jo', Meester Nicholson. I sen' you news from de fight," said Lecroix, and with a parting wave of his hand he cracked his caribou-hide whip and was off on the trail to the southern posts and far-off Flanders.

Day by day, as he followed the Singing Rapids trail to the Height-of-Land, now leading his team to pack down the new drift, now riding where the wind had brushed bare the icy shell of streams or beaten the snow hard on the lakes, the Cree came to look with changed eyes on the bleak winter hills and silent forests of his native land. It was a far journey he was entering on, and, as he hurried south behind his eager huskies, he realized that there might be no return down these valleys for the dog-team of Joe Lecroix. He was going he knew not where, to fight the enemies of the Great Father—the Great Father, of whom his children of the forests had but the vaguest ideas from post-trader and missionary. In the two days he spent at Half-Way-House he had learned what the factor had gathered from newspapers and letters brought by the Christmas-mail team, and it had been sufficient for Joe Lecroix.

The fur trade stagnant and no one depending on

his efforts for support, the news of the fighting in France had fired the imagination of the Cree. The Big Chief was calling for men. Thousands of white Canadians had gone and more were going. Should the red man be found wanting? Where in all Rupert Land was there a keener eye over the sights, a more daring bow-man in Company boats, as tireless a dog-runner? And the enemies of the Great Father pressed him sorely. Down in Quebec by the big river all through the autumn the air had been torn with the speaking of the rifles in the ranges—so Nicholson had read to him—and the wide plain trampled by the feet of the marching sons of the Great Father. For a year, maybe two, a black fox would be worth hardly what an otter once brought. Far at the lonely post by the Fading Waters the deep snow mounded all that had once made his life a thing of value to him—the Montagnais girl he had married one year, and lost, all in the short space between the passing and the return of the gray geese. There were no small mouths for Joe Lecroix to feed, no ties that held him, and the Big Chief was calling for men. The word had travelled far into the north, even to the snow-swept spruces of Rupert Land, and had found the heart of one of his children.

It was a bitter trail that the Cree had chosen—the trail to the St. Maurice posts. In the Height-of-Land country the first January blizzard swept down on the team hurrying south. Burrowing into the snow with his dogs, to escape the searing wind with its scourge of fine crystals that struck like shot, he

waited, while the forests rocked above him, for the storm to blow itself out. Then, after days of toil in the deep snow, the spent dog-team floundered into the post at Lost Lake.

There the factor raised his hands in protest at the purpose of the voyageur to push south in the bitter weather. "There's two feet of new snow. You'll be weeks making Kickendache; wait until the cold lets up and the wind eases the trail."

But the call of the Big Chief still rang in the ears of the Cree, and when his dogs were rested he pushed on. So he journeyed south, harassed by the stinging January winds which cut the faces of dogs and driver like a knife-edge; camping under star-encrusted heavens over which the northern lights pulsed and streamed, while forest and icy shell of river and lake snapped and cracked and boomed in the pinch of the withering cold.

At last a team of gaunt huskies crept out of the north into Weymontechene, where the new Transcontinental, leaving the upper St. Maurice, swings west toward the Gatineau headwaters. The weekly train to Quebec was due in three days, but the Cree would not wait; he had never seen the Iron Horse of the white man and preferred to keep on down the river with his dogs.

One day late in January a sentinel patrolling a road leading to the great training camp at Valcartier, now almost deserted of troops which had been forwarded to England, saw approaching a team of lean huskies hitched to a sled, followed by a tall figure in caribou-

skin capote. As they neared him he gazed with surprise at the huge northern dogs and their wild-looking driver. Stepping into the road in front of them, he raised his hand. The tall driver shouted to the lead-dog and the team reluctantly stopped, slant eyes, flattened ears, and low rumble in throat evidencing their desire to leap at the stranger who dared threaten the dogs of Joe Lecroix with lifted hand.

"Halt! No passing here! What d' you want?" shouted the guard, lowering his bayonet as the lead-dog bared his fangs with a menacing snarl.

"Quey! Quey!" replied the driver. Then quieting his restless dogs he continued: "I cum from de nord countree, Rupert Lan', to fight for de Great Fader."

The Canadian stared at the wind-blackened face, caribou capote with its gaudy Hudson's Bay sash, and embroidered leggings of the voyageur.

"Good Gawd! Rupert Land? You've travelled some to enlist," he said. "Come up to the sentry-box. I'll turn you over to the sergeant."

Leaving the Cree in the road, the soldier entered the neighboring shack.

"Sergeant, there's a wild Injun outside, with a team of man-eatin' dogs, who wants to enlist. He's mushed a long way from the bush."

The sergeant, who came from western Ontario, was interested.

"Bring him in!"

The Cree entered the shack where the sergeant and two privates sat around a stove.

"Quey!" said Joe Lecroix, his black eyes snapping with pleasure at the martial appearance lent the room by the rifles and kits of the men.

"Bo'-jo'! Where you from?" answered the Ontario man, using the Ojibway salutation. "You look like the end of a long trail over the snow."

"Oua, yes! My name ees Joe Lecroix. I travel one moon from Half-Way-House, four sleeps from Mistassini Lac."

"Well, I'll be damned! So you've been on the trail a month and want to enlist?"

"Oua! Fur no good! I cum to fight for de Beeg Chief. I am good man. Strong as bull moose, run lak de wolf."

The Cree squared his shoulders, shifting his gaze from one to another of his hearers as if challenging them to disprove his words.

"Well! Well! A month on the trail in midwinter over the Height-of-Land! That's some spirit, men!"

The sergeant turned to the others, whose faces pictured the impression the physique and story of the Cree had made.

"I don't know whether they've enlisted any Indians yet, Joe; but I'll take you to an officer."

The Indian's face fell. Almost fiercely he repeated: "I am good man—can shoot, run wid dog-team, bow-man on Company beeg canoe. I can fight strong for de Great Fader!"

"I believe your story, my boy! You sure look like a rough customer in a mix-up, and any man who comes clear from Rupert Land to enlist deserves

recognition. I wish we had a hundred like you in our regiment. I'll take you to the officer of the guard."

Followed by the Cree and his dog-team, the sergeant strode to the neighboring barracks, passing on the way soldiers who stopped to gaze in wonder at the wild recruit and his huge huskies.

Gaining admittance to the office of the officer of the guard, the sergeant saluted and told his story.

"I've got a big Cree Indian outside, sir, who says he's driven his dogs clear from the Rupert River Country to enlist. And from the condition of his face and the looks of his dogs, I believe him. I've driven dogs myself, sir, on the Transcontinental Survey."

"We haven't enlisted any Indians yet, sergeant."

"I know, sir, but I wish you'd have a look at him. He's a big, handsome-built lad, and it seems hard to turn him back after being on the trail a month."

"You say he's come all the way from the far north with his dogs?" asked a gray-haired officer present.

"Yes, sir. They look it, too."

"Have the sergeant bring him in, captain," said the older officer. "I'd like to see the Indian who is patriotic enough to spend a month on the trail in midwinter for a chance to get himself shot in France."

Entering the room the Cree opened his skin capote, throwing back the hood from a face cracked by wind and frost. A sinewy hand brushed the thick hair from the narrow eyes that searched the faces of the officers for a clew to the verdict that would send him

back heart-broken over the bitter trail he had travelled, or make him a soldier of the Great Father.

"You want to enlist?"

"Oua, yes, I cum to fight for de Great Fader."

At the quaintness of the reply the suggestion of a smile crept into the gray eyes of the older officer.

"Where are you from?"

"I cum wid dog-team from Rupert Lan'."

"When did you leave?"

"I leave Half-Way-House, Creesmas tam."

"You've been on the trail ever since?"

"Oua, yes. I cross Height-of-Lan' to St. M'rees water and follow riviere trail. I cum more fas' but de blizzard ketch me."

Then the Cree, wondering, if men were wanted to fight, why they hesitated to accept him, impetuously burst out with:

"I am strong man! I mak' beeg fight! I can shoot goose in de air wid rifle. I show you I am good man!"

The earnestness of the Indian had its effect. While the gray-haired officer talked with his junior in low tones, Joe Lecroix, perplexity and fear written plainly on his rugged features, awaited the verdict. They wanted fighting men, and here he was, known as a hunter and voyageur from Whale River down to Grand Lac Victoria, offering his services to the Great Father, and yet these soldiers seemed unwilling to take him.

"He'd make a smashing man in khaki, captain. He's the timber we want—look at his neck and shoul-

ders. It would be shameful after the hardship he's endured in getting here to refuse to enlist him."

"We may have trouble with Ottawa over it, sir, but I'll give him a chance. These wild ones take a lot of drilling; they don't like discipline. They want to see fighting at once because they can ride and shoot. You remember those cattlemen from Calgary, sir?"

"Yes, but give the Indian a trial; I'll take the responsibility."

So Joe Lecroix was enlisted into the —th Canadian Infantry, then at Salisbury Plain, England, a reserve unit of which was still stationed at Valcartier awaiting removal to Halifax.

When the red recruit stripped for the physical examination the surgeon grunted in admiration as muscles, steel-hardened on the white waters and the portages and sled-trails of Rupert Land, rippled and bulged under the bronze skin.

"The handsomest big man I've seen at Valcartier, colonel," he told the gray-haired officer who inquired for his protégé. "He's got the back and arms of a Greek wrestler."

Then, after much heart-burning, mumbling in guttural Cree, mauling of hairy heads and pointed ears, and rubbing of wrinkled noses, Lecroix sold his friends, loyal since puppyhood—friends which no winter trail, however bitter, had daunted—to a resident of Quebec, disposed of his furs, and became a soldier of the King.

But great as was his joy in the attainment of the goal which had lured him out of the white north, his

disappointment on learning that most of the Canadian troops had already left for England was no less intense. To have toiled through the midwinter snows of the Height-of-Land country, only to find that he would be cooped up in barracks until spring, weighed heavily on the spirits of the impatient Cree thirsting for the firing line in France and a shot at these unknown enemies of the Great Father. Was it to be for this tiresome grind of daily drill and inactivity that he had left his trap-lines in frozen northern valleys?

At first there were those among the white recruits with whom Joe Lecroix was quartered who resented the idea of comradeship with a wild Cree from the Rupert Land "bush." But the big Indian who talked little and smoked much in barracks, apart from his comrades, was patently too dangerous a subject for the practical jokes or hectoring of any but the most reckless.

However, one night a commotion in the bunk-room brought a sergeant cursing to the door, to find an enraged Cree holding off two privates with the remnants of a heavy bench as he stood over the insensible bodies of three of their comrades. Blood welling from a cut made by the butt of a Ross rifle, smearing his thick black hair, heightened the fierceness of the narrow eyes blazing with the fighting lust of his race. The Cree had swung the bench back over his head for a rush at the last of his assailants, who brandished clubbed guns, when the sergeant sprang between them.

The officer afterward privately remarked to his captain: "The Injun had a fightin' look in his face as

he stood over them drunks that'd 'a' put the terror to a regiment of Germans."

At the subsequent court martial, Lecroix refused to make a charge against his comrades who had returned from leave drunk and started the trouble. In fact, he scorned the opportunity, offered him by the officers presiding, to avoid punishment by pleading self-defense. So he suffered the penalty of confinement and extra duty meted out to the rest; but by the same mark, suddenly, to his surprise, found himself the most popular man in barracks.

" That Injun's white clear through, and a wolf in a fight," was the general comment from the ranks.

But Joe Lecroix was pining for the war in France and the weeks were slipping by. Then, one morning, when the reserve unit of the —th was ordered to Halifax, the heart of the Cree was made light. At last they were going—crossing the Big Water to the great fight.

But at Halifax they were assigned to the barracks of the —d Infantry which was about to sail and the Indian gave himself up to despair. He should never see the war, never have the chance to fight the hated Germans. As he watched the men of the —d march down to their ship there grew in his heart a fierce resentment at his lot, almost a hatred of those fortunate ones chosen to go, while he who had toiled so for the opportunity to fight in that far-off France, must stay behind.

Three days later Colonel Waring of the —d Ca-

nadian Infantry, bound for Southampton on the troop-ship *Ontario,* was saluted by one of his captains.

"We've found a stowaway aboard, sir. He's a Cree Indian; belongs to the reserves of the —th, who arrived in Halifax Monday."

"What in thunder did he stowaway on a troop-ship for if he wanted to desert?"

"He wants to fight, sir, not desert. He has quite a history."

"What do you mean, Captain Booth?"

"Why, one of the officers of the —th told me the Indian had travelled with a dog-team from the far north to enlist. He heard about the war in a Hudson's Bay Post and mushed five hundred miles in midwinter. I wish more Canadians had his spirit."

"Well, well!" muttered the colonel, "and he couldn't wait to go with the —th, so came with us? Let me see him!"

Smeared with the grime and tar of the ship's hold, Lecroix stood before Colonel Waring and saluted.

Unflinchingly the small eyes of the Cree met the gaze of the officer.

"Do you know what desertion means?"

"Oua, yes, seer!" replied the Cree.

"Why did you leave your regiment, then?"

"I wan' to fight, not to rot all dees winter in de barrack."

"Um!" The officer scratched his chin.

"Didn't you know you'd be sent back on the next ship for Halifax?"

"I wan' to fight, seer! I travail all de Januar'

moon to Kebec to fight, not to lie like a squaw in de barrack."

The black eyes of the Indian bored straight into those of the colonel. The officer dropped his own to note the bold features and powerful build of the man before him. Here was no ordinary Indian, but the makings of a magnificent soldier. He found himself wishing that he commanded a regiment of the mettle of this deserter. Finally he said:

"Desertion in time of war is the gravest offense a soldier can commit. Um!" Again the stubby fingers sought the square chin. "To be sure, you have deserted for the front. Um!" Another pause. "Still you will be sent back to your command and severely punished. Um!" More rubbing of the chin followed; then:

"Captain Booth, enroll and quarter this man temporarily with your company and report immediately to Halifax by wireless. On landing I will turn him over to the authorities for deportation."

But somehow the case of Joe Lecroix was not reported to the authorities when the regiment landed and went to the great camp at Salisbury Plain. Furthermore, later, by some magic, the Cree's name was stricken from his company roll in the —th reserve unit at Halifax and allowed to remain on the roll of Booth's company of the —d. After another severe reprimand from the colonel, there the matter rested, to the surprise of the battalion.

But Joe Lecroix soon realized that at the camp at Salisbury Plain, with its army corps of marching men

at drill, its ceaseless staccato of rifle practice in the ranges and roll of the deeper-tongued field-pieces, he was still far from the fighting in Flanders. Yet regiments and divisions were daily leaving for the front and his spirits rose. Some day to him would come the call to strike for Canada and the King.

It was not long before the —d Battalion had reason to be proud of the stowaway of the *Ontario,* for in the first rifle match in which the Canadian Division contested the red private from Rupert Land showed a total absence of nerves and an unerring eye by getting repeated bull's-eyes on the shorter ranges of two, three, and five hundred yards, winning the match for the Canadians.

That night at mess the colonel of the —d was overheard saying to a captain:

" That little matter at Halifax has been adjusted, captain. They'll have to come and get him if they want him now, after this afternoon, eh?" And the officers grinned widely as they wrung each other's hands, for the rivalry at Salisbury Plain was keen.

Finally, one day there came an end to the impatience of Private Lecroix, for the Canadians were ordered to France. At last the men from the Selkirks and the Saguenay, from the ranches of the Saskatchewan and the forests of Ontario and Quebec—cowboys, miners, and city men, farmers, trappers, and lumberjacks—were to have their chance to strike for England and Our Lady of the Snows.

Without avail they had chafed and growled and protested under the long period of preparation de-

manded by the chief of staff, but at last these hardy sons of the north were pronounced fit, and soon their ears would vibrate with the shriek of shells from the great guns over the channel. And at the news no eyes in the Canadian Division brightened with anticipation as did the beady ones of Private Lecroix, sharpshooter. At last he was to see these hated enemies of the Great Father.

For three weeks the —d Battalion had been holding a section of trenches in the mud at Ypres. For three weeks sharpshooter Lecroix had been watching the Prussians opposite for a shot at a head or an arm, as the gray owl of his native north watches a barren for ptarmigan. Time and again an unwary German had paid the penalty of offering the target of a few square inches to an eye trained to the keenness of the hawk's in wringing a livelihood from the lean lands of muskeg and forest. An eye and a hand that had held the rifle-sights true on a gray goose riding the wind found little leisure in the trenches of Flanders.

But this holing up in the mud like a musquash, this dull waiting for action which never came, wore sorely on the patience of the restless Cree. This was not the manner of war he had pictured to himself as he lay by his camp-fire in the snow on the long trail south through the stinging January winds. It was the personal combat of lunge and thrust, of blow for blow, after rifle-firing and a wild charge—the struggle of strong men at close grips, of which he had dreamed and for which he now thirsted. Of artil-

lery he had known nothing and this ceaseless thundering of the great guns, this taking to earth, like a fox to his burrow, when the high-explosive shells shrieked over, harassed his pride; this wiping out of men with shrapnel and machine guns was like emptying a charge of shot into a flock of bewildered yellow-legs on the James Bay marshes—it was not man's work.

But at length fate smiled on the one who had waited long. From the day that the —d Battalion reached the front, tales of the night forays of a neighboring Gurkha regiment had travelled to them down the trenches. In twos and threes these little brown men of Nepal, armed only with their terrible native kukeri, had been wriggling over on black nights, like snakes through the grass, to the advanced trenches and listening posts of the enemy. A leap, a thrust in the dark, a groan, and the stabbed men lying stiff in the gray dawn alone told the relief that the Gurkhas had been out again.

That these miniature men from far Himalayan foot-hills, whom he could toss with one hand, as he tossed the fur packs of the Great Company on a summer portage, should show the way to the German trenches to a dog-runner of the Rupert Land trails rankled sorely in the heart of the proud Cree.

"I know," replied his lieutenant, when asked for leave to go out on the next dark night, "but they haven't got a listening post or advanced trench in front of us; they're too far away and you can't expect to pile into a main trench full of Boches and not get wiped out. You're crazy, and besides, we need you."

However, one night, when, anticipating a surprise attack, the eyes of those on watch were straining into the blackness which enveloped them, the heavy silence was broken by a shout from the enemy's line, followed by rapid rifle-firing; then all sounds ceased. For three hours an officer of the battalion, followed by a sergeant, nervously patrolled his position. At intervals they climbed to the parapet and peered long into the darkness, conversing in low tones. Then, just before dawn broke blue in the east, there was a challenge from a sentinel, followed by a low reply from the gloom outside and shortly over the parapet into the trench crawled a dark shape. A half-frozen, mud-caked figure, with a crimson blotch smearing the neck of his sweater, stood before the captain.

"Are you hit hard, Lecroix?" Captain Booth asked anxiously. "We thought they had got you."

"Eet bleed beeg, but ees only leetle t'ing, seer. I lessen by dere trench, but many men camp dere. Eet was no good." And, shaking his head regretfully, Private Lecroix ran a calloused thumb over the razor edge of the long knife he carried lashed to his left wrist by a thong. "W'en I grow ver' cold," he continued, "and tak' de back trail, dey hear me and shoot."

During the following nights the Germans were heard digging, and shortly they occupied a new listening post a stone's throw from the Canadian lines. Following this discovery, Private Lecroix was observed putting the finishing touches on the edge of a second long knife, borrowed from a company cook in

the rear. At last there was fighting ground within reach where he might find the odds as small as three or four to one, and the heart of the Cree beat high, for his great moment was at hand.

But at dusk, something was in the air on the front of the —d Battalion. Officers talking in low tones hurried up and down the trench. Then support battalions from the rear began pouring out of the communicating trenches, and from man to man sped the news that brigade headquarters had ordered a surprise attack at midnight.

Joe Lecroix lifted clenched fists to the skies and cursed his luck in French, English, and Cree. These officers in the rear at headquarters were going to spoil his little personal affair out in front, and it was sure to be a night of nights, for the darkness was closing in black as a spruce swamp. He had promised himself a call with a knife in either hand on that listening post, and now it was to be a general attack.

Shortly the order was read to the men in groups along the trench.

"At one o'clock the —d Battalion will rush the enemy's first line with the bayonet. At one-fifteen, the artillery will shell the enemy's support trenches to check counter-attack. The advanced trench in front of —d Battalion will first be taken by surprise by a special detail to prevent drawing enemy's fire on main attacking force following."

To a grim group crowded in a dusk-filled bomb-proof, Captain Booth repeated the order for the night's work. As they listened to the call which

meant to many there certain death gradually the earnest tones of the officer's voice died into the distance, while before their eyes flashed visions of far familiar hills and prairies fresh with rain, of rivers singing through forests green in a Canadian June, of loved faces—and then the deep voice of their leader brought them back overseas to a trench in the mud of the Flemish lowlands.

"Men," he was saying, "I want volunteers to go out and get that sentry-post. This is the job of A Company. If we get them without a racket, the —d Battalion will see the sunrise from the German's first line. If we make a mess of it, dawn will find most of us out there stiff in the mud. I want single men, for it's desperate work."

For an instant the men stood motionless, silent, as the officer waited, then the tall figure of Private Lecroix pushed forward from the rear and saluted.

"I weel get dem trench, seer," said the Cree, his eyes glittering with excitement, for he knew now that he had not ground the edge of that second knife in vain.

Then another and another followed the Cree, and passing down the trench, repeating his call, Booth soon had the pick of the company. From these, six were chosen.

"Lecroix," said the officer, "you've been out there and know the ground. You are in command of this party and will arrange the details at once."

The general attack was to start at one o'clock, so the six men on whose success depended the lives of hundreds of their comrades made their preparations.

At twelve, the scouting party, stripped to sweaters, jeans and moccasins, wrung the hands of officers and comrades, slipped over the parapet, and crawled out into the Flemish murk to their tryst with death. With a knife in his teeth and another bound to his left wrist with a thong, Joe Lecroix moved snakelike through the slime toward the trench-head fifty yards away. By agreement he was to attempt first to learn the number of men in the post and wait for the others to come up; they would then divide, three circling to the communicating trench in the rear, and at a whistle all rush the sentries with the knife. It was a long chance that they might wipe out the Prussians without warning the enemy's main trench, but the desperate nature of the work only steeled the muscles of Joe Lecroix, filling his heart with a wild exultation.

While his comrades of the forlorn hope had sent home many messages before starting, Lecroix had dictated but one, addressed to the factor at Half-Way-House.

"Meester Nicholson," he had said to the sergeant, writing in the dim lantern-light of the bomb-proof.

"De huntin' ees ver' good een dees countree. To-night I tak' leetle voyage, not ver' far, to see fr'en'. I bring leetle present for dem, one een each han'. Eef dey like dem present, I see you some tam een Half-Way-House, maybe. Eef ma fr'en' don' tak' dem present, tell de peop' een Rupert Land dat Joe Lecroix was no good to fight for de Great Fader.

"Bo'-jo'! ma Fr'en',

"Joe Lecroix,

"—d Battalion Canadaw Infantree."

This was the farewell of Private Lecroix to Rupert Land. But as he wormed his way, foot by foot out into the black silence of the No Man's Land between the trenches to the death-grapple that the hour would bring, there went with him the poignant memory of a mound in a far forest clearing, where now the birch leaves of two autumns lay thick under the shifting snow, at the lonely post by the Fading Waters.

The Canadians, flat in the mud fifty feet from the trench-head, waited for Lecroix to reconnoitre.

Wriggling on his chest, like a goose stalker of his northern marshes, often stopping for minutes to listen for voices, the Cree noiselessly advanced. Finally, out of the impenetrable gloom, came the low sound of conversation. Whether the parapet was feet or yards away he could not tell. So he crept nearer. Again he heard voices. His keen eyes were unable to pierce the black wall in front. Yet the trench must be close at hand. The Cree moved a few feet. The voices ceased.

Lecroix waited, hardly breathing, for what seemed an eternity, then he thrust out his hand and touched a rise in the ground. It was the sand-bag parapet. With mad indifference to the risk he ran he rose to his knees, groping up the face of the slope, when his fingers met a cold, unyielding surface. He extended his reach. It was the steel barrel of a machine gun.

Like a cat the Cree withdrew and circled the trench-head, hoping to find in the rear a vantage-point from which, if a match were struck to light a pipe, he might determine the number of his foes. Reaching the nar-

row passageway leading to the listening post, he crawled upon the loose earth thrown up at the sides and waited. Shortly in the trench-head an electric flash was turned on, and in the faint glow the Indian caught a glimpse of two faces bent over pipes and a burning match. Then all was dark again.

It was late, how late he did not know, but surely well on toward one o'clock. There was no time to lose. To go back to the men waiting for him and bring them up to rush the trench-head might take too long—and if they were heard? Then all was lost! He had been chosen by his captain to do this thing. He could not fail. He had seen but three, the two faces in the light and the back of another standing. This was the way to them, from the rear through their own trench, and—in a flash came the decision—he, Joe Lecroix, would go—alone.

At Valcartier they had hesitated to enlist an Indian. Well, a Cree should show them all, now, how one of his red children could strike for the Great Father. He would prove that the forests and barrens bred men. Here to-night, in the alien mud of Flanders, he would vindicate his dark skin and the honor of his race. He, Joe Lecroix, would go into that den of Prussian wolves and with the naked knife carve the name of the northern Cree high on the honor roll of the soldiers of the Great Father.

Fearing to disturb loose earth, he followed the trench back, then slipped into it. Down the passage, barely wide enough for a man's body, he crept upon his foes. At length the Indian lay within two yards

of the opening into the trench-head, listening. He had already forgotten the men waiting out there for his return, for one o'clock was near and the lives of the —d Battalion now rested solely on the fighting blood of a dog-runner of Rupert Land.

Grasping a long knife in each hand, his legs set under him like steel springs, the Cree crouched at the opening for the leap, when again the flash illuminated the floor of the trench; but the light only served him the better to drive his first thrusts home as he sprang upon the Prussians.

Lunging savagely as he rose from the stabbed men, Lecroix knifed the sentry at the machine gun before the German knew the fate of his comrades, but at the same instant, from behind, a bayonet following a German oath was driven deep into the right shoulder of the frenzied Cree, crippling his arm. Brought to his knees, the Indian drove the knife in his left hand upward in a desperate thrust as another heavy body hurled itself upon him from the parapet, and the three, fighting blindly, rolled to the trench floor. But the left hand of the wounded Cree, underneath, finally wrenched free from the mêlée of arms and legs; the long knife lashed to the wrist of steel found its men, once, twice—and in the trench-head between the lines there was left no sentry to warn the Prussians in the rear of the coming of the Canadians.

Smeared with mud and blood, his right arm hanging helpless from his bayoneted shoulder, his comrades of the scouting party found Joe Lecroix with his Prussian dead. Close on their heels, the —d Bat-

talion stole by and leaped, like wolverines, with knife and bayonet into the German trenches before a single machine gun spat its red flash into the blackness. Then the artillery opened on the enemy's supports hurrying up the *boyaux* from their second line, and chaos was loosed.

Dawn broke on the Canadians anchored in their goal, but long before this the tale of how the surprise was made possible by the taking of the Prussian trench-head, single-handed, by Private Lecroix, —d Battalion, had travelled far up and down the lines.

Days later Booth told an interested group at brigade headquarters:

" When the rest of the advance party, fearing Lecroix had been wiped out, rushed the trench, they found the Indian stanching a bayonet wound in his shoulder with his good hand, and five dead Huns piled around him. Our stowaway, colonel, has paid for his passage. He saved the —d."

" And the —d, and Canada, will not forget," came the answer.

The spring mail-canoe was in from the south at Half-Way-House. Nicholson, the factor, sat in his trade-room devouring the first papers he had seen since the Christmas dog-team brought into the north the news of the great war. The tepees of Crees in for the spring trade—little as the Company now offered for fur—covered the post clearing where huskies yelped and Indian children shouted at play

while their elders lamented the ruin of the fur trade by the great war across the Big Water.

Presently Nicholson gasped, and with eyes bulging sprang to his feet.

"My glory! Listen to this!" he cried to the clerk.

"Official Gazette: For conspicuous gallantry in taking single-handed an advanced post of the enemy with machine gun, at Ypres, Flanders, in which he was severely wounded, Joseph Lecroix, private, —d Canadian Infantry, awarded the Victoria Cross."

"Hooray for Joe Lecroix and Rupert Land!" bellowed the excited Scotchman, waving the paper in his hand as he rushed past his open-mouthed clerk and the astonished Crees to tell his wife the news.

Presently a chattering throng of Indians and whites gathered at the flagstaff in the stockade, while the howls of the huskies added to the clamor. Then Nicholson shouted:

"Ten volleys of Company shells, lads, for Joe Lecroix and Half-Way-House!"

As the red emblem of the Great Company fluttered to the breeze, the explosion of many rifles shattered the age-long silence of the wild valley, loosing the echoes among the timbered hills, and from a hundred throats was shouted the name of one who had journeyed long and dared much in the far lowlands of Flanders for the honor of Rupert Land and the Great Father.

OUT OF THE MIST

OUT OF THE MIST

"WEEL, w'at you t'ink, Loup? De Albanee onlee leetle piece now? We do good job to mak' for de sout' shore, eh?"

With a whine the great slate-gray husky in the bow turned his slant eyes from the white wall of mist enveloping the canoe to his master's face, as if in full agreement with the change of course.

The west coast of James Bay lay blanketed with fog from the drifting ice-fields far to the north. Early that morning, when the mist blotted out the black ribbon of spruce edging the coast behind the marshes of the low shore, Gaspard Laroque had swung his canoe in from the deep water. For hours now he had been feeling his way alongshore toward the maze of channels through which the Albany River reached the yellow waters of the bay.

Fifteen miles of mud-flat, sand-spit, and scrub-grown island marked the river's mouth, and his goal, the Hudson's Bay Company post, Fort Albany, lay on the easternmost thoroughfare of the delta. There waited the dusky wife and children he had not seen since his trip down the coast over the sea-ice at Christmas with the dog that now worried at the scent of the invisible flocks of geese that rose clamoring through the fog ahead of the boat. Bought when a puppy

from an east-coast Eskimo at the Bear Islands, the husky had been his sole companion through the lonely moons of the winter before on the white wastes of his subarctic trapping-grounds.

"Whish you, Loup! Here we go!"

Swinging the nose of the boat well off the flat shore, the half-breed dropped to his knees, placed a battered brass compass on a bag in front of him, and, following the wavering needle at his knee, started straight out through the smother of mist across the delta of the many-mouthed Albany. Two, three hours passed, and still the narrow Cree blade bit into the flat surface of the bay as though driven by an engine rather than by human thew and sinew, when suddenly the husky lifted his nose, repeatedly sucking in and expelling the baffling air. Then with a whine he suddenly sat up, throwing the canoe off its bottom.

"W'at you do, Loup? You crazee? Lie down!"

But the husky did not lie down. Instead, his black nostrils quivered in long sniffs as he faintly sensed the strange odor that the moisture in the heavy air almost obliterated. Then the hairy throat of the great dog swelled in a low rumble as he strained against the bow brace, peering into the impenetrable mist.

"Ah-hah!" chuckled the Cree, interested. "W'at you t'ink you smell, eh? No goose mak' you so cross; mus' be seal."

In answer the hair on the dog's back lifted from ears to tail, and raising his nose, he broke into a long howl, a warning which his master knew full well meant that from somewhere out of that wilderness of

mist human scent had drifted to the husky's palpitating nostrils.

Again from the dog's throat rolled the challenge of his wolfish forebears to the hidden enemies, and out of the fog ahead floated the answer of a human voice.

"Quey! Quey!" called the Cree in reply, and ceased paddling.

Again the voice called from the fog; again Laroque answered, and started paddling slowly in the direction of the sound. It was a canoe from Moose, he surmised, bound for Fort Albany, and he was nearer the south shore than he had reckoned. Then of a sudden out of the mist ahead broke the black mass of a ship.

The paddle of the surprised half-breed hung suspended over the water while the dog bellowed his rage at the mysterious thing looming through the fog. Clearly it was not the small company steamer from Moose Factory, which was not due at Albany for a month, after the fur-brigades had arrived from the up-river posts, but one of the big ships.

Still, what was one of the company ships from across the big water, which never entered the treacherous mouths of the Moose or the Albany, but unloaded at Charlton Island, a hundred miles east, doing here? Then it flashed across the Cree's brain that the vessel had missed the island in the thick weather and had run clear to the Albany flats, where she had anchored.

"Quey! Quey!" Laroque gave the Cree salutation to the men at the rail of the ship as he paddled

alongside. "You goin' travel up de Albanee?" he added, with a grin. But there came no answer to his question.

Shortly a gold-braided cap crowning the bearded face of an officer appeared at the rail, and a gruff voice demanded:

"Where are you from and where bound?"

"I go to Albanee; been huntin' up de wes' coast las' long snows," replied the Cree, while the excited dog bared his white fangs in a snarl at the strangers peering down at the canoe.

"Keep your dog quiet!" the officer rasped.

Gaspard spoke to the husky.

"Now make your boat fast to the ladder and come aboard."

After the long months he had spent alone with his dog, the half-breed welcomed the opportunity for a chat and a meal of ship's rations with the crew of the vessel. Furthermore, she was out of her course, in a dangerous position, close in on the Albany shoals, and the captain needed the information he could give him. So lashing his canoe to the rope ladder dropped over the side, Laroque clambered aboard, followed by the yelps of his deserted dog.

Twice Laroque had seen ships of the Hudson's Bay Company loading furs at Charlton Island, but he knew at once from the looks of the long deck-house and the size of the vessel that she was not one of these. A group of sailors, talking together in a strange tongue, eyed with frank curiosity the swart trapper with gaudy Hudson's Bay sash, skinning-knife at

belt, and sealskin moccasins as he followed one of the crew aft. At Charlton Island the men of the company ships spoke English and were friendly to Cree and Eskimo, he thought. Surely there was something queer about this ship.

On the after-deck three men in uniform were conversing in low tones. As he approached the group, the restless eyes of the Cree made out, behind the officers, two long shapes covered with tarpaulin, which failed to conceal their heavy metal standards rising from the deck-plates. What could these things be, he wondered. No Hudson's Bay ship carried such strange gear on its after-deck.

The curious eyes of Laroque were suddenly shifted to the bearded officer who had hailed him from the ship by the abrupt question:

"What's your name?"

The domineering manner of the speaker and the undisguised curiosity and amusement with which the others inspected the half-breed, from fox-skin cap to moccasins, stung the trapper's pride. He had boarded this ship to render the captain a service. The manner of these people was not to his taste. His face set hard as his small eyes met those of his questioner when he answered:

"Gaspard Laroque."

"You are an Indian?"

The tone of the officer brought the blood leaping into the face of Laroque. He, Gaspard Laroque, who held the record for the bitter Fort Hope winter trail from Albany, whose prowess as canoeman and

hunter was known from the Elkwan barrens to Rupert House, was no sailor to be treated like a dog.

Squaring his wide shoulders, he flung the thick hair from his eyes with a toss of the head and said defiantly:

"My fader was French; my moder Cree. But I tell you somet'ing: eef de win' rise from de nord or eas', dees boat land on de beach lak dat," and leaning forward, Laroque snapped his fingers in the captain's face.

Choking with rage, the officer stood for a moment inarticulate. Then shaking a fist wildly, he loosed a torrent of unintelligible words at the half-breed, who watched him coolly through narrowed eyelids.

"Answer my questions promptly," the big sailor finally managed to sputter in English, "or I'll have you ——" Then regaining his self-control, he continued in calmer tone:

"You say you are bound for Fort Albany?"

The Cree nodded.

"How far do you think we are off the mouth of the river?"

"You are ver' close; onlee t'ree, four mile'. Dees ees bad place for beeg boat, ver' bad."

The reply had a decided effect on the officers, who conversed for some time in low tones; then the captain turned to Laroque.

"You know the Albany River—the channel up to the fort?"

The secret was out: this was not a company ship. These people were strangers to James Bay or they

would know that the treacherous river channels were unnavigable for big boats. But what business could a strange craft have at Albany—a craft manned by a crew speaking a tongue unknown to the bay, with a captain who spoke English as no skipper of company ship or Newfoundland whaler spoke it?

"De channel to de fort no good for beeg boat," replied Laroque, his swart features, stone-hard in their immobility, masking the thoughts which harassed his brain.

"How deep is the channel at low tide?"

"Onlee seex, eight feet ovair de bar. No good for beeg boat," insisted the Cree, searching the bearded face before him for a glimmer of the purpose behind the question.

At the reply the captain turned to the men beside him, and spoke rapidly in the alien tongue, while the restless eyes of Gaspard Laroque swept deck and rigging, to fall again upon the shrouded shapes rising from the after-deck which first had baffled his curiosity. His inspection was interrupted by:

"How far above the mouth of the river is the fort?"

"Feefteen mile' dey call eet."

"How large is the garrison? How many guns have they?"

Laroque shook his head, but he was thinking hard.

"Do you understand me?" Then the officer articulated slowly as he added: "How many men are at the fort? How many guns are there, and what size?"

For a fraction of a second the small eyes of the Cree glowed with the light of a dawning comprehension, but the bold features remained set as if cut from rock. It was clear now. This strange craft meant danger to Fort Albany. She had come into the bay for the furs at the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, and this captain wanted to know how well those furs were guarded.

Often, before the fire in his grandfather's tepee, he had heard the old man tell how long ago the French had sailed into Hudson's Bay and burned the fur-posts of the English; how once in these waters the English had fought great sea-fights with the French for the fur trade. But that was many, many long snows ago, in the time of his grandfather's grandfather. For generations now the ancient foes had been at peace. At Fort Albany, the Christmas before, the factor had told him that the French and the English had been fighting side by side since summer, across the big water, against a yellow-haired race who wished to rule the world. But the thunders of the Great War were heard but faintly on the shores of the far, subarctic bay.

"Answer me! How many men are at the fort?" fiercely demanded the officer, glaring into the face of the Cree.

The thought of the defenseless loved ones waiting for his return at the little unfortified fur-post, with its handful of company men and red trappers, spurred the active mind of Gaspard Laroque as the flick of a whip on a raw harness sore rouses a lagging

husky. The French blood of his father spoke in his answer.

"Ver' manee men. Beeg gun', *petit* gun', all kin' gun' at de beeg fort at Albanee." Then an inspiration led him to point to the tarpaulin-covered shapes on the after-deck that first had puzzled him. "Beeg," he cried; "ver' much beeg dan dose gun'."

The faces of his audience palpably fell. Calling two sailors, the captain ordered the covering removed from one of the guns. It was the first modern piece of artillery Gaspard Laroque had seen,—the obsolete cannon at Moose Factory were relics of the Riel Rebellion,—but the fate of Fort Albany was in his hands; so he smiled derisively at the long steel barrel and polished mountings of the four-inch Krupp.

"Dat ees leetle pistol to dem beeg gun' at de fort," he laughed, to the amazement of the officers of the German commerce-destroyer *Elbe,* then added: "An' de men,"—the lips of the crafty Cree moved as if he were making a mental calculation,—"ah-hah!" he finally announced, "de men at de fort mus' be, las' time I was dere, two, t'ree hunder."

The big German captain seized the arm of the Cree.

"Three hundred men at the fort?" he cried. "Impossible! What are they there for?"

The swart features of Laroque relaxed in a wide grin at the discomfiture of his enemy, but behind that grin his active mind searched for a plausible answer. In a flash he had it.

"Las' Chreesmas-tam dey hear ship comin' to de bay to tak' de fur dees summer. Solger' travel from

Canadaw on de snow." Gaspard marvelled at the ease with which he was playing the part.

It was interesting news for the officers of the *Elbe*, and, from their scowling faces and excited conversation, the Cree judged, highly disconcerting.

The council of war continued for some time; then the youngest of the group, a smooth-faced boy of twenty-four, turned to Laroque affably.

"You have a fine dog in your canoe. We will hoist him aboard with your stuff."

It was a polite way of informing the Cree that he was a prisoner; but it was a relief to hear that his shaggy comrade was not to be abandoned. For next to the wife and children at Albany Gaspard Laroque loved the great dog down there in the canoe worrying over the absence of his master as he loved nothing on earth.

"T'anks," said Laroque, gratefully. "I mak' heem good dog on ship."

The trapper followed the officer forward to where the canoe lay alongside. There was the husky, whimpering for the return of the man who had deserted him.

"Whish you, Loup!" the Cree called down, leaning over the rail.

The nose of the husky pointed upward in a yelp of delight at the sound of the beloved voice, his thick brush of a tail switching furiously to and fro in an ecstasy of welcome.

Calling some sailors, the lieutenant said to the Cree:

"Go below and make your dog fast to the tackle

they lower; but remember, if you attempt to escape, you are a dead man."

Laroque dropped down the ladder to the canoe, to meet the rough caresses of two hairy paws and swift licks from a hot tongue, while the rumble in the deep throat of the husky voiced his joy at his master's return.

As the nimble fingers of the Cree fashioned a sling from the lowered ropes for his protesting dog, his small eyes furtively swept the rail above him. The muzzles of a dozen rifles covered the canoe. To make a break for the cover of the fog would be suicide. They would get him before he wet his paddle.

Laroque first sent up his fur-pack and bags, then made his husky fast to the lowered lines. Rubbing the slate-gray head of the worried and perplexed dog, who resented being trussed up in a harness of rope, he gave the signal. Struggling to free himself as he hung suspended, snarling and snapping at his bonds, the infuriated animal was hoisted to the ship's deck by the men above.

Swiftly following by the ladder, Laroque reached the rail to find pandemonium loosed. There on the deck, surrounded by shouting seamen, the maddened husky rolled over and over with two sailors in a tangle of arms, legs, and rope, while his white fangs struck and slashed right and left in a desperate effort to fight himself clear.

Leaping from the rail, the Cree threw himself upon his dog, and after a struggle managed to separate the husky from his tattered victims, who bled from slashes

of knife-like teeth in arm and leg, paying dearly for their recklessness in laying hands on a king husky from Ungava whose dignity had been sorely outraged by their roughness.

Clinging to the dog, whose blood boiled with the fighting lust of a hundred wolfish ancestors, the Cree waited with fear in his heart for the verdict of the officer on the conduct of his shaggy comrade. Surely now they would shoot him or pitch him overboard, he thought. But he looked up with surprise into a smiling face.

"That's a dog after my own heart," cried the young German, surveying with admiring eyes the magnificent animal who, held in the grip of his master, snarled defiance at the group of murmuring sailors well out of reach.

"De dog was scare' of de rope; he weel not bite dem now," urged Laroque in defense of his friend, and bending over, he poured into the pointed ears set flat on the massive head of the dog soothing words in Cree.

"Of course, when they hauled him on deck, the sailors put their hands on him, and he upset them like nine-pins. Lucky for them he wasn't loose," replied the officer, and the heart of Gaspard leaped with joy.

"Cast off that sling and make him fast to the ring-bolt there. He'll cool off soon. I've Great Danes of my own at home."

"How you come to dees countree?" the Cree hazarded, for he knew the passage through Hudson Straits at that time of year to be a perilous one.

The German smiled.

"I don't wonder you're surprised at our being here," he answered. "It got too hot for us in the north Atlantic. We lost the English cruisers that were chasing us in a Labrador fog. Then the captain decided to come into Hudson's Bay and do a little fur business."

"You strike de ice in de straits?"

"Oh, yes; we were in the floes two weeks—nearly lost the ship. But we're here now, and are going to make the English pay for our coal in good fur."

Laroque made Loup fast with an inch rope to the ring-bolt in the deck, and by means of much rubbing of flattened ears and back-scratching gradually soothed the fret out of the dog. Then he ordered the husky to guard the fur-pack and bags placed beside him, for had Loup been left alone without this responsibility, he would have made short work of the rope with his powerful fangs, and sought out his master.

The Cree was then led to the captain's cabin.

Since the first interview the manner of the big German had undergone a surprising change. The half-breed was received with marked cordiality. He accepted a proffered cigar, but refused to take the liquor pressed upon him. To the wily Laroque the purpose of these men was too evident. They confidently expected a half-breed trapper to drink himself drunk at the opportunity and betray the people of the post, all unaware of the danger which lurked so near in the fog off the river.

So overpowering a hatred of these strangers momentarily possessed him that it took all his self-command to keep his hand off his knife and then and there, in the narrow cabin, avenge this insult to his manhood. But the knowledge that the wit and daring of Gaspard Laroque alone stood between the safety of the little settlement at Albany and fire and pillage at the hands of these sea-wolves brought him to his senses.

Only the glitter in the deep-set eyes of the Cree evidenced the fierce emotion that had swayed him when the captain slapped his empty glass down upon a table and said:

"You say they have new guns at Albany. Are they mounted in earthworks surrounding the post, or is it an old stone fort?"

Laroque was stumped, but he caught at the suggestion in the first part of the question. He was playing the game through to the bitter end, so he hazarded:

"Oh, plentee new gun' in dirt-wall and stone-wall. Strong place, dees Fort Albanee."

It was painfully evident from the sober faces of his hearers that they were impressed with the magnitude of the undertaking before them.

For some time the officers debated in their native tongue while the Cree smiled inwardly at the consternation in the enemy's camp over the tale of a half-breed they despised. Truly the factor, MacGregor, would never recognize his log buildings, with their frail dog-stockade, from the descrip-

tion which the Germans had drawn from their prisoner.

"Is the channel buoyed?" asked the lieutenant at length.

Laroque was at a loss how to answer, for the Germans were sure to find the buoys when the fog lifted, unless a scheme which had been forming in his mind should somehow work out, a forlorn hope, to be sure, and dependent on the fog hanging a day or two longer.

"Sometam few buoy'; but de channel shif' ev'ry year, and de buoy' no good den. I don' know eef dey tak' buoy' up dees year," he finally answered.

"Oh, I guess you will remember the river well enough to take small-draft boats up to the fort." The captain winked at the others and laughed loudly. And the Cree's quick brain caught the meaning only too well. They would put him at the wheel of a launch, with a gun at his head to refresh his memory of that shifting Albany channel. Well, a man could die but once. He would beach the launch somewhere below the fort and take his medicine, but he'd carry one or two of these yellow-haired fur-thieves with him when he went. There was a chance that they might be seen through the factor's glasses and the warning not come too late if the post Crees could get at the boat and wipe out the crew. But if the launch should get back to the ship with the information that there were no signs of guns at the unfortified post, they would probably attack at once with the whole ship's crew.

The council of war ceased, and Laroque was asked:

"Could men land below and approach the post from the rear?"

This, most of all, was what the Cree feared the Germans might do, for the people at Albany would never know of their coming until they emerged from the scrub behind the post. The yelping of huskies was so common at Albany that no attention would be paid to it.

"No," he answered; "beeg swamp seex mile' long below Albanee."

Again the captain poured three fingers of brandy into a glass.

"Come, now, you're a good fellow," he urged, offering the liquor to Laroque. "The fog is wet; a little drink will warm you up."

Each of the officers filled a glass, waiting for the Cree to take the one in the captain's extended hand.

Gaspard Laroque grinned guilelessly into the face of his would-be seducer.

"De water of fire eet mak' me sick." With a grimace, he placed a sinewy hand over his stomach.

The eyes of the Germans met in dubious glances. Here was a new breed of barbarian, impervious to the seduction of alcohol. It was astounding, contrary to all experience. Slowly the disgusted captain returned the proffered brandy to the table.

"Now, see here," he began, and, reaching back into the drawer of his desk, brought out a handful of gold coin, clinking it in the Cree's impassive face. "You tell me the truth and pilot the launches up to the fort,

and I'll make you rich, drop you anywhere you say on this coast, and nobody will know you met us. I'll fill your canoe with guns, shells, clothes, anything you want. What is this company to you? You sweat, freeze, and starve for your fur, and they cheat you out of it. The Indian is the company's dog. They barely keep you people from starving so that you will hunt more fur. Come, now, you play no tricks on us, and we'll fill your canoe from the ship's stores."

The German sat back satisfied that his appeal must have an effect on this inscrutable Indian.

Slowly the swart features of Gaspard relaxed. His small eyes glittered as he said, leaning forward eagerly:

"You geeve me all des outfit, grub, gun', blanket', if I show you de way up river to Albanee?"

"Yes, I'll make you a rich man among your people. No one will ever know. When we've got the fur at Albany, we'll land you anywhere you say. But if you lie to us,"—the German, with a black scowl, shook a huge fist in the Cree's face—"I'll skin—well, you know what you'll get."

"You fill de cano'?" asked Laroque, ignoring the threat.

"Yes."

"Ver' well, w'en you go?" he asked quickly.

"When the weather clears a launch will go up to reconnoitre."

"Ah-hah!" grinned Laroque. "I show de way." And German and Cree wrung each other's hands.

Laroque was assigned a bunk in the forecastle,

where he took his duffle-bag, leaving the fur-pack on deck with Loup. The crew left the dark-skinned barbarian with the wicked-looking knife in his belt, which had not been taken from him, severely alone, though he met many an ugly look from the sailors, who he knew itched for a chance to wreak their vengeance on the great dog who had roughly handled two of their mates.

Although he was watched, for he was never out of sight of a sailor, evidently the orders were to treat the prisoner civilly. Escape was impossible, for his canoe had been slung on the deck-house, and to attempt to reach the shore by swimming would have been pure suicide. So he had the freedom of the ship, for clearly his captors were desirous of his good-will.

The black night closed in on the anchored ship with no sign of the fog lifting. Laroque obtained food from the galley, and fed his dog, fastened on the main-deck amidships; then, lighting his pipe, sat down on the fur-pack beside him. Now and then a petty officer, giving the tethered husky a wide berth, strolled by to assure himself that the Cree had not dissolved into the murk.

When his vigorous puffing had turned the pipe hot in his hand, Laroque took a piece of wire from his pocket and thrust one end into the bowl. For a space he smoked hard while he toyed with the head of the husky lying at his side. Often the dog would open his punishing jaws and close them gently on the hand of the man, at the same time voicing undying adoration in the low rumble in his deep throat.

In a few minutes Laroque removed the wire from his pipe, the end of which was now red-hot. Then between his moccasins he stretched on the deck a piece of dressed caribou-hide a foot long by a few inches in width. For a moment he listened for footsteps, then, striking a match, held it close to the hide between his feet and behind his dog's body while he burned slowly into the skin with the hot end of the wire a syllabic character of the Cree tongue.

Pipe after pipe he smoked as he crouched there in the dark on the deck with his dog, for the wire soon cooled and needed reheating. At the sound of footfalls the Cree would snuff the match out in his calloused hand and wait until the sailor passed. Once the smooth-faced lieutenant, whose watch it was, stopped to chat with him about the Northern sled-dogs and his own Great Danes on his father's place at home, but so thick was the fog that the Cree did not deign even to remove the wire which he was heating in his pipe at the time.

So, slowly and with much patience, Gaspard Laroque, working under the kindly curtain of the thick night, was able to cover the strip of hide with the phonetic writing of the Cree. Then grunting into the hairy ears of his friend, and with a parting scratch of the ever-receptive back, the trapper went to his bunk in the forecastle of the ship, which was vocal with the snoring of strong men deep in sleep, to dream of the burning of Fort Albany by a shore party of Germans and the loss of those he loved.

The following morning Gaspard Laroque went on

deck, to find the bay still hidden by its pall of mist. No boat from the ship would go out in that fog, and he drew a deep breath of relief; for if the mist held on the west coast one more day,—and it looked like a regular July week of thick weather,—these yellow-haired pirates might yet be foiled of their prey by a despised half-breed.

The uneventful day was drawing to its close. Again they had had him in the captain's cabin, and again he had refused the brandy all but forced upon him, and had drawn from his imagination a vivid picture of the strength of Fort Albany in guns and men. As to Moose and Rupert House, he had not been there lately, he told his eager audience, but had heard that they had received reinforcements from Canada and were equally prepared for an attack from the sea.

Truly the stupidity of these strangers was approached only by that of the porcupine, he had whispered into Loup's pointed ears after the cross-questioning. The fools had hardly a month to wait to get the winter's hunt of all the James Bay country at Charlton Island, but they seemed ignorant of the existence of the big depot.

The remainder of the day the Cree had spent with his dog, feeding him in mid-afternoon a double ration from the galley. Time and again he had sprung to his feet from the fur-pack where he sat, and spurred the animal into a fury of excitement by speaking softly, pleadingly to him in Cree. Over and over he had repeated the same words, and at each repetition the husky had leaped to his feet with a whine, ears

forward, nerves on edge, electrified; and one of these often-repeated words was the Cree for home.

That night the anchor-watch on the *Elbe* drowsed at their posts. For an hour the flood-tide had been sweeping past the ship toward the Albany delta. So thick hung the smother of mist that the single lantern lighting the forecastle-hatchway was drowned at thirty feet. Amidships the husky lay curled, with his nose in his bushy tail, beside the fur-pack.

Suddenly the animal straightened, lifting his head to sniff the baffling air.

"Whish you, Loup!" came the whispered words out of the blackness. The dog sprang to his feet, every muscle tense. Murmuring in Cree followed. The tail of the husky switched back and forth, but the rising whine was stifled by a familiar hand closing on his nose, while an arm of his master encircled him.

Swiftly a collar of plaited caribou hide was knotted on the husky's neck. Attached to the collar was a water-proof pouch of sealskin containing the strip of hide with this message in Cree characters burned in with the wire the previous night:

"Yellow-beard ship off river-mouth. When fog lift' they come in boats to steal fur, burn post. I steer boat close in Whitefish Point. Wait there. Good-bye, wife, children! The good God help you!

"GASPARD LAROQUE."

To sever the rope which Loup had chewed nearly through that afternoon was a matter of seconds.

Then the Cree, taking the massive head in his arms, whispered the words that had aroused the husky during the day.

"Home!" he said. "Go home, Loup! Home! Out dere!"

Though the husky trembled with excitement, every nerve alive, the intelligent animal seemed to sense the necessity for silence as the fingers of the Cree closed again on his nostrils.

"Home! Home!" Laroque repeated again and again, whispering the familiar names of his wife and the four-year-old boy with whom the dog had grown up from puppyhood and whom next to his master he loved above all others.

Then he lifted the excited Loup to the rail, while his voice broke in a farewell, "*Bojo,* Loup! Home!" and sent the dog he loved down into the black waters of the bay.

The heavy body of the husky struck the flat surface with a loud splash. To the eager ears of the Cree, who hung over the rail, peering into the blackness, came a smothered whine of farewell as the dog rose to the surface; then silence.

Aroused by the noise, the sleepy watch gave the alarm. Shots were fired blindly into the mist. Half-wakened sailors tumbled out of the forecastle-hatch; officers hurried forward from the after-cabin. From the bridge the search-light played around the ship against the impenetrable wall of fog. But the dauntless cause of the uproar, swept struggling past the bilges by the strong current, had turned with the tide,

and was already straightened out on his long journey for the mouth of the Albany and home.

Meanwhile the Cree, who had glided forward catlike, on moccasined feet, flattened himself against the rail when the first of the crew passed him, then, following the hurrying men, showed himself to a boatswain with a lantern, who led him aft to an officer vainly demanding the cause of the disturbance.

"I thought at first you had been foolish enough to try to swim ashore," said the young lieutenant. "I objected to putting you under guard, so I'm glad you're here."

"My husky chew de rope an' tak' to de water," vouchsafed the Cree.

"Your dog? Too bad! He'll never reach shore in this fog."

The severed rope at the ring-bolt told the story. It was evident that the husky had taken French leave as the German jokingly pointed out to the Cree. And Laroque now knew that no one had seen him steal out of the forecastle.

"I thought you said the dog wouldn't leave your fur-pack."

"Weel, I guess he hungree for rabbit-meat," replied Gaspard, lightly, but his sick heart was out there in the black night toward the Albany delta with his faithful friend battling his way blindly home.

It was all a matter of luck, Laroque told himself, as he lay in his bunk. He had waited until the tide was running hard before sending the dog off, and Loup was too clever to fight the current; he would

swim with it. He had learned that as a puppy. But, unable to see the shore in the fog, he was more than likely to be swept into the main channel of the river and miss the flats to the north, where he could find the beach. In clear weather he would bet his life that the tireless Loup would make the post by sunrise. Once landed, the fifteen miles up the river shore would be nothing to the best sled-dog on the west coast. Loup would go directly to the cabin, and Gaspard's wife would see the pouch on the collar and take the message to the factor. It all depended on whether the husky in the scent-defying fog could smell the shore and bush and turn in instead of swimming blindly on up-river with the tide until exhausted. Then the Cree prayed to the Great Master, whom the Oblat fathers at Albany had taught him to reverence, for the life of his dog and the safety of those he loved.

For another day the fog-bank hung on the west coast; but in the evening a fresh northwest breeze followed the invisible sunset, and shortly the stars were out. The low islands of the Albany delta lay a dark smear on the western horizon.

At daylight the *Elbe* was alive with activity. An open launch lay off her leeward beam with an evil-looking quick-firer mounted on the bow. Other boats still at their davits were being overhauled and loaded with guns, ammunition, and provisions. Laroque was given his breakfast, then ordered to report to the captain aft.

"You are to pilot a scouting-party in the launch up

the river. If you run the boat aground or do not immediately obey the orders of the officer in charge, you'll be shot instantly. Any sign of trickery, and you're a dead man. If you serve us well, I stand by my promise. You get your canoe filled from the ship's stores and a bag of gold."

As the officer snapped out the English words in his German accent, the fingers of the Cree itched for the handle of the knife at his belt. His swart face went still darker with the hate in his heart for this yellow-beard whom he would split as he split a dead caribou had they but stood face to face, alone, on the beach.

In command of the first officer of the *Elbe,* twenty men, armed with rifles, crowded into the launch. The Cree was glad that the friendly subaltern was not detailed with the party. Laroque was ordered to a post beside the wheel, handled by a quartermaster. Close at his back stood the lieutenant. Why, the Cree only too well knew.

The run to the mouth of the Albany was quickly made. As the launch entered the river the heart of Gaspard Laroque raced under the strain of uncertainty as to what the next few miles would disclose, for if Loup had reached the post, the Crees would have lost no time in cutting the channel-buoys, long spruce saplings driven into the mud.

They rounded a sand-spit, and for miles had a clear view of the river. Breathless, the Cree leaned forward, shading his narrowed eyes with his hand as he searched for the first buoy marking the channel. Quickly glancing from the east to the west shore for

the lob-stick ranges of spruce fixing the position of the buoy, he again looked up-stream. His heart drummed in his chest. The sun-glare on the water bothered his eyes, so once more he sought the lob-stick ranges. Again he swept the locality where the sapling should rise twenty feet above the water. He sucked a great breath into his lungs and expelled it, for he saw that the buoy had been cut.

A thrill of pride swept Gaspard Laroque. Loup, his Loup, had won through out of the wilderness of that black night to the shore and Albany. His shaggy courier had fought his way home. The post knew of the coming of the Germans.

The Cree turned coolly to the officer, who held an automatic pistol pressed against the small of the half-breed's back.

"I not see de buoy. One was dere." He pointed in the general direction of the channel.

"Never mind the buoys; you know the channel. She draws only four feet. Take her on up the river."

"Ver' weel. I can show de way, but I lak' to see de buoy." Truly, he swore to himself, he would show the way to these men; for with the buoys out of the way, his course would not be questioned, and the old buoy off Whitefish Point, six miles above, was not so close to the shore by a hundred yards as he would steer that launch.

The tide was high, and there was little chance of his grounding the small-draft boat even on the flats, but as the Cree with the pistol at his back directed the course of the man at the wheel, he was thinking harder

than he ever had thought in his life; for one short hour would see him a dead man or else —— Well, it would all be over soon.

On sped the launch past the low Albany shores. Not a buoy broke the surface of the wide river-mouth. The gunners in the bow with the one-pounder stood with eyes glued to their glasses. Huddled in the cock-pit, aft of the gasoline engine, the sailors sat in silence, grasping their rifles.

As the swift craft put mile after mile of the river behind her, the low scrub of the shore gradually gave way to heavier growth, and at last Whitefish Point, thrusting its spruce-clad silhouette far into the stream, opened up ahead.

Though the pulse of Gaspard Laroque pounded like a dog-runner's, his grim features gave no evidence of the tension under which he labored. Only a mile now, he thought.

The launch had covered half the distance when the Cree turned to the officer at his back and pointed ahead.

"De channel swing een close to dat point. Outside onlee t'ree, four feet water." As he spoke, he stealthily shifted his footing. The helmsman, ordered by the officer, swung the launch inshore.

Shortly the Cree again protested:

"We run on de flat. Channel ees een shore."

Again the course of the boat was changed.

As they neared the point, the straining eyes of the half-breed were fixed on the willow scrub covering the upper beach. But suddenly his attention was at-

tracted to a line of barely perceptible ripples at right angles to the channel, dead ahead.

"Ah-hah!" he breathed. "Nets!" and every muscle in his body stiffened.

The launch was almost on the nets when a gunner in the bow raised a shout of warning. Like a flash the Cree dropped to his knees, driving his knife into the body of the officer, as the automatic exploded. At the same instant the silence of the shore was shattered by a volley from a score of rifles in the willows. Again and again, in quick succession, the thick bush spat salvos of death on the doomed craft.

Its propeller fouled in the nets, the launch swung helpless in the current with its cargo of wounded and dead. At pointblank range of fifty yards the Cree hunters and Hudson's Bay men had wasted no shells.

Launching their hidden canoes, the company men boarded the boat, to find under the bodies of the dead officer and the helmsman the insensible form of Gaspard Laroque with a bullet-hole in the back.

They buried the dead on the beach, and with the few wounded survivors of the scouting party started for Albany. Two days later his scouts reported to MacGregor, the factor, that the morning following the ambush at Whitefish Point a large launch, after twice grounding on the flats at the river-mouth, had returned to the *Elbe*, which had shortly raised anchor and steamed away to the north.

It was Christmas at Fort Albany. The day previous the mail-team from Moose had arrived with im-

portant despatches from Ottawa. Assembled on the snow before the log trade-house, the post people and the Crees in for the New-year festivities faced the factor.

"Gaspard Laroque!" called the deep bass of MacGregor. The half-breed stepped forward from the crowd.

"In behalf of the Canadian Government, I present you with the Military Cross for conspicuous bravery," and the factor pinned the bronze medal on the embarrassed Gaspard's wide chest amid the shouts of the Crees.

"Loup!" cried the factor. At the sound of his name, the husky, unleashed by the Cree's wife, trotted up to his master, ears forward, tail in air, suspicious of the strange proceedings.

While Laroque held the dog, MacGregor took from its wrappings a brass-studded collar, from which hung a large silver medal, and read the inscription:

"Presented by the Canadian Government to Loup for distinguished conduct in carrying by sea and land the message which saved Fort Albany from the German raider *Elbe,* July, 1915."

On the reverse side of the medal were the words, "For Valor."

Amid the yelping of the dogs and the cheers of the people of Fort Albany, the neck of the great husky was encircled with the credentials of his nobility, and from the factor's broad palm he received on his shaggy shoulders the accolade of his knighthood.

A LITTLE TRAGEDY AT COOCOOCACHE

A LITTLE TRAGEDY AT COOCOOCACHE

THE last rays of the June sun flashed from the dripping paddle of one who drove his birch-bark up the wild reaches of the wilderness river as though life itself were at stake. And it was.

All day and half the preceding night François Hertel had poled and paddled and portaged, putting mile after mile of the racing St. Maurice between his canoe and the railroad camp at Coocoocache. The long hours of pull and drag and thrust which his will forced upon the wire cables that were the muscles of his back and arms had long since left them numb to all sensation. Still, automatically, they drove pole and paddle.

On he crept up the river as the day died, now rising to thrust viciously through quick-water, again dropping to his knees to push stubbornly through the slower stretches. Once or twice, as the twilight slowly masked the stream behind him, the voyageur threw a quick look backward. But well he knew that with the six hours' start he had on his pursuers no crew from the railroad camp at Coocoocache could overhaul François Hertel, famed from Timiskaming to the Roberval as a canoeman. When once he reached the forks where the Manuan and the Ribbon met the main stream he could laugh at those behind. For there

three roads led into the wide north, and the hopelessness of his pursuers' quest would turn them back.

Since midnight, when he had reached his canoe, cached in the brush above the camp of the Transcontinental contractors at the End-of-Steel, and pushed north, he had given little thought to the man lying back there in the shack with a knife in his heart. That had been the inevitable result of the dead man's infamy. He had paid in the coin of the north, and there was an end to it.

But the raw agony of his own home-coming would live with him by day and by night until the good God took what was left of François Hertel. The grief that had struck him from the blue sky on his return from his winter hunt to find his home a charred ruin and his wife Marie gone—drowned, or dead somewhere in the forest, no one knew which—would companion him into the gray years. Again and again as he drove his canoe up the long quick-water he had recalled the joy that had been his when he turned the bend above the Hudson's Bay Company post at Coocoocache—Cree, for Nest of the Gray Owl—and his glad eyes sought the cabin on the island he had built the previous summer for his young bride. How he and Philippe, his partner, had sung, thinking she might hear them before they came in sight around the bend, and then—the thrust of pain that reached his heart at the grim spectacle of his ruined home. Song there died on his lips, never to return.

They had hastened to the island, but nothing in the ruins enlightened them as to the fate of Marie. Hop-

ing to find her safe at the post, they had crossed the river. There the frenzied husband listened as the factor told the pitiful tale.

A week before Hertel's arrival the yelping of the huskies had brought the post people from their beds to find the cabin across the narrows in flames. A canoe went over at once but found no traces of Marie Hertel or her husky dog. In the morning the factor discovered in the mud of the shore the deep imprint of boots. That was the only clew. They recalled, then, that twice during the spring Marie Hertel had told the factor's wife of the visit of a canoe from the railroad camp. But the sight of her rifle and the long fangs of the husky had driven off the drunken contractor, Walker.

Some days after the fire the body of the poisoned dog was found in the brush near the camp. But the ruins of the cabin gave up no further clew to the fate of Marie Hertel. Killed and thrown into the river to cover the crime, doubtless, the factor surmised.

It was a madman who listened with drawn face to the ghastly tale. At the end he shook off, like children, those who attempted to hold him back from starting for the camp across the river. Hertel had tossed his rifle into his canoe and was shoving off when the factor's warning checked him.

"Wait, François! We only suspect; we don't know. If you go over there now they might get you before you get Walker. Wait and see your friend Desaules up-river before you make yourself an outlaw."

So the desperate trapper had waited.

First he went down-stream with Philippe, searching the shores for the drowned body of his wife, but in a week returned from the hopeless quest. Up the Right-of-Way, at the gravel-pit, no one could give him any information, the Frenchmen in the contractor's gang meeting his inquiries with shrugs of the shoulders; but in their eyes was sympathy. Still, they knew nothing.

At the engineer's camp ten miles above he found his old friend Desaules, whom he had guided across to the Abitibi years before on the preliminary survey.

"Yes; he always had a streak of yellow, François; we've had plenty of trouble with him on this job, but he has political influence at Ottawa. Wait for the government police; they are due in a few days for the investigation."

"I will save dem de trouble. Au revoir!" And, gripping the hand of his friend, Hertel had started back to Coocoocache. There a Frenchman of Walker's gang came to him secretly at the post and told him that he had seen Walker's canoe returning from the island the night of the fire.

The contractor's fate was sealed.

That afternoon Hertel erected a cross of hewn spruce on the site of his ruined home and with a hardwood stick burned into the white wood the words: "Marie Hertel."

The following morning Walker was found dead in his bunk with a knife in his heart. Attached to the

steel haft of the knife was a scrap of birch bark on which were written these words:

" For cross on islan I leeve dees cross.
" FRANÇOIS HERTEL."

When Hertel reached the forks the stars were out. Passing the mouths of the Manuan and the Ribbon, he chose the main stream, travelling far into the night. As the moon dipped into the blue-black silhouettes of the Laurentians he went ashore, carried his canoe and outfit into the forest, where he cooked some food and slept. In less than twenty-four hours he had fought his way up forty miles of the St. Maurice, much of it white water and poling current. But little it mattered to François Hertel that he had performed a feat few men in the north could equal, when far down the river, in some lonely backwater, the stricken body of her whom he cherished lay floating by the shore unburied.

One evening, a month later, two men sat in the trade-house of Lost Lake Post discussing a bottle of whiskey with the factor.

" Now, look here, McCready, you don't mean to tell us that Hertel didn't show up here after he murdered Walker? " said one of the strangers.

" I tell you," replied the fur-trader vehemently, " that I haven't seen François Hertel this year; but I warn you now that the luckiest thing that can happen

to you two will be never to come up with him. He'll wipe you out if you do."

"Come, now, you don't suppose that any Frenchman in this province could get the best of us two?" answered the detective, bristling with anger. "We've run down too many of these bad men."

"I've advised you to start down-river; now, if you get hurt it's not my fault," growled McCready, his eyes glittering. "I know Hertel. If Walker had done to me what he did to François, I'd have killed Walker, and if you government people came trackin' me into the bush I'd kill you, too, before I'd stand trial. Now you know where I stand, Mr. Dobson."

"Well, I'll give you Hudson's Bay Company people fair warning that, if you intend to protect outlaws from justice when the government has ordered them held if they show up at a post, you're going to see some trouble with Ottawa. I'll take care, also, that the commissioner at Winnipeg hears of this."

"All right," returned the stubborn Scot; "make your complaint, but take your crew and start down-river to-morrow. This post is too small for us three; besides, you've been interfering with the trade. To-day you tried to take some of my Crees down to the railroad to get information out of them."

"That ain't so, McCready," broke in the third man, "the Crees are lying to you."

"My Crees don't lie; they have to learn that sort of thing from government detectives," replied McCready, making no effort to conceal his contempt. "I'm only sorry Hertel ain't here. He'd make the

two of you take water right enough. There ain't an abler man or better rifleshot in the north country than that Frenchman."

"Well, McCready," said Dobson, "he'll come back with us, nevertheless, if we fall in with him, or he'll lie where he's hit."

The factor laughed sarcastically as he said: "I guess you never heard of his fight at La Tuque with the lumberjacks. He licked a herd of 'em single-handed down there two years ago. You wouldn't start him sweatin' if he took hold of you with his hands, and with a knife ——"

The door of the trade-room swung open with a crash. On the threshold stood a tall stranger. Beads of sweat trickling down his swart features and corded forearms, from which the sleeves of his shirt were rolled, together with his quick breathing, gave evidence of recent hard paddling. His deep-set eyes met the gaze of the government men, who faced the door at the interruption, with a challenging glitter.

McCready sprang to his feet, upsetting his chair. Then, recovering himself, he cried:

"Bonjour, Pierre! How are the people at Half-Way-House?"

Ignoring the question, the voyageur strode toward the table where the government men exchanged furtive glances. But McCready, stepping in front of him, seized his hand, saying as he did: "What brings you from Half-Way-House, Pierre?"

The set mouth of the stranger momentarily threatened a smile and the eyes softened.

"T'anks, ma fr'en', but eet ees not Pierre from Half-Way-House." Then, addressing the men at the table, he said: "I am François Hertel from Coocoocache."

At the words Dobson got to his feet, turning to the wall where his revolver hung in its holster from a wooden peg. But Hertel was there before him, and, seizing the detective by the shoulders, with a quick wrench hurled him half-way across the room to the floor.

Dobson's mate, surprised by the suddenness of the movement, stared irresolutely at the Frenchman, who was now between the government men and the corner where their Winchesters stood.

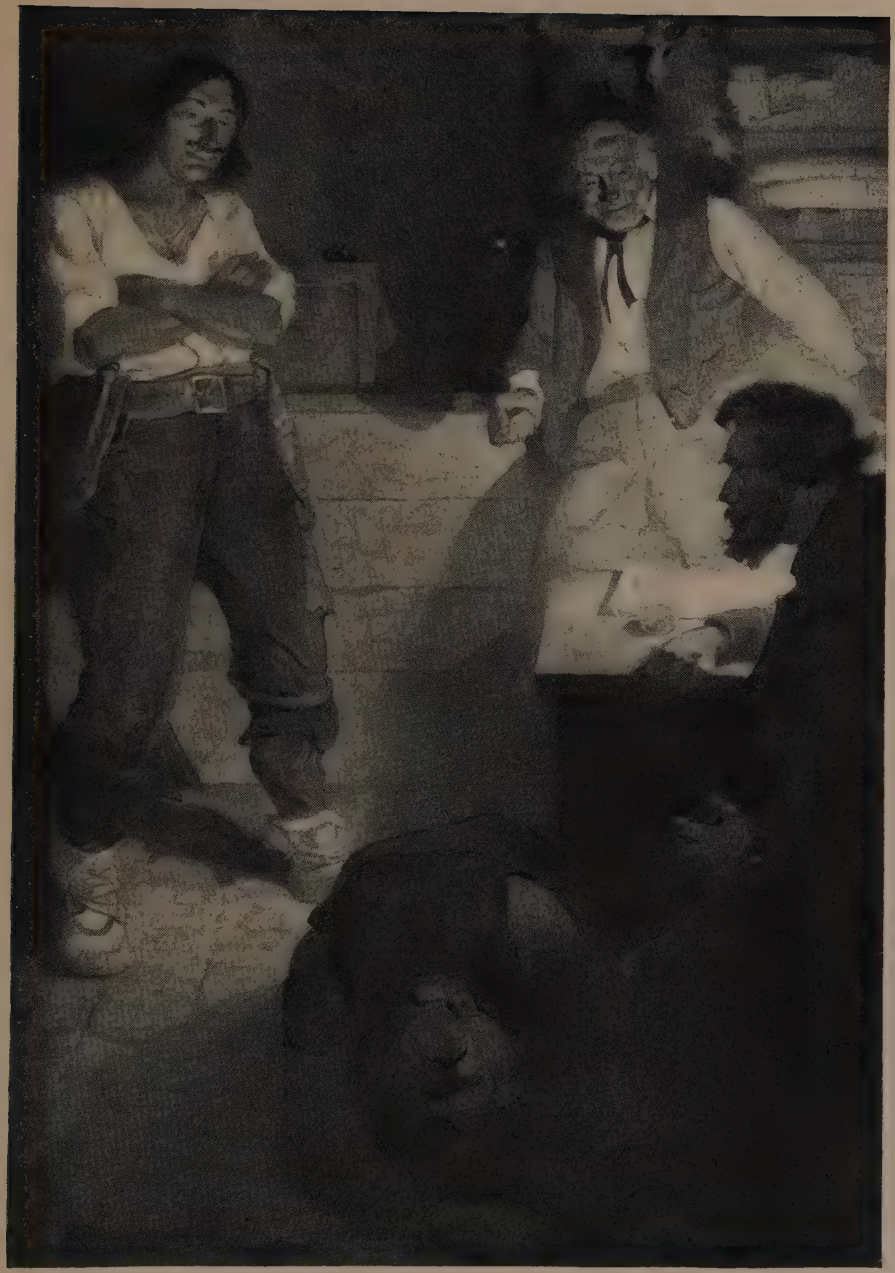
Hertel smiled as he watched Dobson slowly regain his feet. Then he repeated:

"I am François Hertel. I hear you cum to Los' Lac to tak' me. You lose tam; here ees you' man. At you' plaisir!"

McCready, leaning against the hewn spruce planking of his counter, laughed loudly at the discomfiture of his guests.

"Yes, Dobson, I was wrong; my eyes are growing weak. I can swear that this man is François Hertel. There he is! Take him!"

"Damn you, McCready," cried the exasperated and already cowed detective, "I'll bet you put this job up!" For an instant he looked longingly at the rifle out of his reach, then snarled at Hertel: "If you're François Hertel, you're under arrest for the murder of Walker at Coocoocache.



"I AM FRANÇOIS HERTEL."

You'd better give yourself up and come peaceably."

"Ah-hah! So dat ees de way de win' blow?" derisively rejoined Hertel, leaning carelessly, arms folded, against the wall in the manner of a cat baiting a mouse. "I t'o't you cum to tak' François Hertel wid you' han'. Now, w'en he travel long way to geeve you chance, you two beeg, strong man you try scare him wid beeg talk, but you 'fraid soil you' han' on François Hertel, eh?"

Hertel's white teeth flashed in a dangerous smile as he waited a movement from his enemies. As they made none, he took the pistols from the wall and flung them through an open window, while his erstwhile hunters helplessly bit their beards in their rage. With a few words the Frenchman had wrung the braggadocio from them as one wrings the water from a towel. They knew their master and made no move to interfere when Hertel took their Winchesters in his left arm and, shaking hands with McCready, turned sarcastically at the door.

"And dey sen' you to tak' me, François Hertel, down riviere? Tell dem dat François Hertel goes far into de nord w'ere leetle boy detec' will get los' on hees trail. Nex' tam sen' some men to fin' heem, not leetle boy wid heart of rabbit."

And with an "Au revoir, ma fr'en'," to McCready, he disappeared into the night.

"Well, you two are a fine pair of buckos to come up here into the bush after a man," sneered Mc-

Cready as Dobson slouched into a chair on the exit of Hertel.

"If I ever saw a couple of full-grown men take water, I saw it to-night."

"What could we do?" protested Dobson. "He had us blocked from our guns."

"Yes, but he didn't turn them on you. He dared you to put your hands on him. He just wanted to tie you into a few knots and let you go. If he'd cared to, he'd 'a' knifed you both before you knew what was happening to you or shot you where you sat."

"You needn't fear, McCready; he ain't seen the last of us," sullenly replied the government man.

McCready's Scotch blood went hot.

"What, after a man has shown you up for a pair of chicken-hearted tenderfeet? You'll leave this post to-morrow morning! Understand? You've made enough trouble among my Crees already. If you stay here much longer you'll be wakin' up some mornin' with a knife in your chest as Walker did; only this time it'll be a Cree who'll leave it there, and for the same reason that Walker got his. To-morrow your canoe heads south. Good-night!"

On their return the government police reported that they had found no traces of François Hertel in the headwater country of the St. Maurice. Then the authorities raised a hue and cry from Ottawa to Lake St. John, offering a reward for the murderer, dead or alive, and despatched packets by the main river routes

into the north. For Walker had political friends in Ottawa, and the majesty of the law needs must be sustained.

In the autumn, when the birch leaves gilded the forest floor and the geese honked south, the canoes returned from their quest—but not with François Hertel.

Later, in December, every dog-team that jingled into a Hudson's Bay post of Rupert Land carried a government order from Ottawa commanding the arrest of François Hertel, French trapper, wanted for the murder of James Walker at Coocoocache on the St. Maurice. And many a hardy fur-trader, to whom this document came, shook his head sadly, wondering what had led his old friend François to make an outlaw of himself—François Hertel, by whose side he had lain under the stars on more than one summer voyage or with whom he had smoked by the roaring birch logs of winter camps. And not a few to whom came this command smiled grimly as they read, for already had the tale of the burned shack and the cross at Coocoocache reached them. For in the north such news travels fast and far. And of those who smiled there was not one but would have fed, clothed, and outfitted the renegade Hertel, had he come seeking succor from the ruthless northern winter, and sent him on his way with a Godspeed. For Hertel had but exacted in good northern coin every farthing of debt Walker owed him. And it is a law of the north that men pay their debts — and collect them.

So it fell out that one January day a dog-team with a man ahead breaking trail and another reeling at the gee-pole of the sled was floundering into the drive of the blizzard that had howled south upon the Height-of-Land country from ice-bound James Bay. For two days, in the teeth of it, the team had labored up the great wilderness lake, now losing the hardened trail underneath and circling in the snow until they found it; then plunging on until the weary trail-breaker and the lead-dog, blinded by the white scourge that beat their faces like a hail of shot, lost the trail again. Then would follow the circling in the soft snow—work that wrung the last ounce of strength from the spent dogs—until the team was again on hard footing.

So for two days they had struggled, facing the pitiless norther. Somewhere at the foot of the great ice-bound lake they knew there was shelter and food and fire. Somewhere, but how many white miles away? Before the new snow had wiped out the trails, Cree trappers had told them that Flying Post lay at the other end of the great lake two sleeps to the west. In two sleeps they had found the lake, but there they met the blizzard. And now the last whitefish had been fed the huskies and the pemmican and tea-bags were empty.

When the tired dogs finally lay down in their traces and refused to go on against the drive of the gale, the exhausted men took counsel.

"We'd better go ashore and make camp while there's light, John," gasped the younger man as the

two snow-crusted figures stood with backs to the stinging wind.

"All right, Mac; but if this keeps up tomorrow we'll never see the post," shouted his companion.

So they drove the team to the shore and made a supperless camp in the shelter of the spruce. The huskies bolted two pairs of moccasins cut into strips and boiled, while the men drank hot snow-water in a vain attempt to stay their hunger, for as yet John Bolton could not bring himself to kill one of his faithful dogs until hope of reaching the post soon was past. In that case the weaker dogs would have to go to save the others and their masters.

All night the white fury beat down from the north. The next morning, with belts tightened against the long hours in the drifts, they started. All day they battled through the deep snow against the bitter wind, which cracked their frost-blackened faces, buried in the hoods of their capotes as they were, until facing its fury was unspeakable torture. Still the fast-weakening men and dogs kept on, for warmth and food and life lay ahead, somewhere over these pitiless hills.

When the early northern night neared, the wind had blown itself out and finally died on Grand Lac Pierre, and the dusk crept out from the black timber of the shores over its white shell to meet a slow-moving dog-team and two men. But, with the dropping of the wind, the increasing cold of a silent January night on the Height-of-Land so numbed the limbs of weakened

men and dogs that they dragged themselves with difficulty through the soft snow to the shore.

" It's all up, Mac!" groaned the older man; " we've got to kill one of the dogs and rest up and get our strength. To-night it'll go fifty below. We must eat or freeze."

The younger man, too exhausted to answer, stumbled on through the new snow, followed by the team. Twice that day he had fallen and failed to rise, begging the other to go on and leave him. Twice that day John Bolton had dragged him to his snow-shoes again and forced him on by sheer will, but the boy had now come to the end of his strength, and that night the cruel cold would cut into their very marrow.

Back in the forest near the shore they found a protected spot, made camp as best they could, and started a fire. Then Bolton took his rifle from its case and shot the weakest of the exhausted huskies. The explosion of the gun echoed loudly from the near hills.

The men had started to skin the dog when a rifle-shot from the lake shattered the freezing air.

The men looked into each other's faces.

" Some one heard our shot," mumbled Bolton. " I'll fire again."

Again came an answering shot. Then both men dragged themselves to the shore. Coming up the lake was a dog-team. Bolton went out on the ice and waved his arms.

In a few minutes a tall dog-runner in caribou-skin capote belted with a red Company sash, leading a team of northern huskies, approached them.

"Quey! Quey!" called the stranger; and then, seeing they were white men: "Bonjour! I hear de shot an' cum back from de islan'."

Dropping his mittens, Bolton seized the proffered hand.

"We've just shot one of our dogs. We're bound for Flying Post and are starved out. Can you give us some grub? This blizzard about finished us."

"Flying Pos'?" The tall dog-driver raised his ice-hung eyebrows in surprise.

"Dees ees not de trail to Flying Pos'. Dees ees de beeg arm of Grand Lac dat run' nord t'irty mile. You lose de trail in de narrow' back dere w'en you not see for de snow."

"Thank God we met you, then!" exclaimed Bolton. "We would have starved out for we were heading north."

"Lucky t'ing, for sure. You get los' easee on dees lac. Flying Pos' ees two day travel wes'. I got plentee deer meat and tea, but leetle flour. I was go to de pos' for flour w'en I heard de shot."

The next day the famished men and dogs feasted on the French trapper's freely offered caribou steaks, bannocks, and whitefish, and rested, then started with their guide for the post. Three days later the dog-teams drew up in front of the whitewashed log trade-house of Flying Post.

In the absence of the factor, Haig, who had gone to Lake Expanse, they were greeted by the rat-faced half-breed clerk in charge.

As Bolton and McIntyre entered the trade-room,

followed by their guide, the half-breed started slightly, then shook hands with the newcomers. Shortly the still hungry men were doing justice to the cooking of the factor's wife while the Frenchman tied the dogs inside the stockade, where they were safe from attack by the Company huskies, and fed them from the post's supply of whitefish.

Later the clerk found Bolton smoking in the factor's quarters.

"You come from de Gatineau country?" offered the half-breed, taking a chair and lighting his pipe.

"Yes, we left the post at Squaw Lake three weeks ago," replied Bolton.

"A-hah, you go far! It ees bad mont' to travel for de beeg win'."

"We are bound for Abitibi, but we had to shoot a dog and may not get a team. Could you sell us two dogs?"

"We got no dog to sell, but"—the clerk winked one of his small, beady eyes—"maybe you don' go to Abitibi, Meester Bolton."

Ignoring the remark, Bolton looked long at the breed, then said:

"We stood a pretty good chance of not making this place; we were starved out and heading north, but by luck this Frenchman Pierre heard our shot when we killed one of the dogs."

"Pierre?" The clerk raised his eyebrows and smiled.

"Yes, Pierre. What's the matter?"

"DEM PAPIER SAY ONE T'OUSAND DOLLAR"

"You hear maybe dat de government hunt for man in dees countree; offair beeg monee for heem?"

"Yes!" Bolton's face went stone-hard.

"Wal"—the clerk took from his pocket the despatch which had reached the post with the Christmas packet—"dem papier say one t'ousand dollar for de man dat catch Hertel."

McIntyre started to speak, but a look from the older man silenced him.

"Well, what's your point?" asked Bolton dryly, after an interval, still holding the weasel eyes of the clerk with steady gaze.

"Have you not guess, Meester Bolton?"

"No; what is there to guess about?"

The clerk looked quickly to see that they were alone, then said: "Pierre, your Pierre"—the half-breed finished in a whisper—"ees dees François Hertel!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated McIntyre; but John Bolton's expression did not change a hair.

"He cum in before de winter mail arrive and get grub. Haig don' know he killed a man on de St. Maurice. But now we know, Meester Bolton. Now we know. I been trading for grub wid heem jus' now. He leave to-day—queek.

"Half dees monee ees mine, half yours, Meester Bolton; but he ees ver' bad man, and you weel have care to tak' heem. Shoot heem in de leg, I t'ink. He ees bad man wid knife."

The last words were uttered in a whisper, for foot-

steps sounded in the outer room, and the Frenchman straightway appeared in the door.

"I cum to say bonjour, Meester Bolton. I go back to my trap lines."

The small eyes of the clerk shifted rapidly from one to the other, while McIntyre sat studying quizzically the face of his chief. Bolton rose and wrung Pierre's extended hand.

"Good-bye, Pierre!" he said. "You pulled us out of a narrow squeak, and we want to thank you again. You can be sure I won't forget you." Then, turning to the half-breed: "Joe here has got the idea that you are François Hertel. I thought I'd tell you, for he might make trouble for you if you showed up here in the spring. Good-bye, Pierre, and good luck to you!"

The Frenchman shook hands with McIntyre, then turned to the clerk, whose narrow face went chalk-white at Bolton's words.

"Leetle Joe here, he said dat?" The fingers of Pierre's right hand toyed with the handle of his knife as he smiled at the trembling half-breed who shrank back in his chair. "Joe, he ees funnee boy. I tell François Hertel eef I see heem. Ha, ha! Joe he ees ver' funnee." And the trapper was gone.

The three men sat in silence until the jingle of bells, a shout, and the crack of a dog-whip told them that Pierre was off on the lake trail. Then the clerk turned on Bolton.

"You are fine beeg man to send to de bush to tak'

François Hertel. Why you let heem go and one t'ousand dollar wid heem?"

"So you think we're government police, do you?"

"Oua!" cried the clerk angrily, "and you have fear to tak' heem?"

"I tell you once and for all that we're government engineers, not police. We're bound to Abitibi Lake on the provincial boundary survey."

"Oua," repeated the clerk with a shrug. "You can' fool me. What you do here dees tam in de beeg snow eef you don' hunt for François Hertel?"

"All right, have it your own way, then; but, as we had your testimony alone to the fact that Pierre was Hertel, and as I wouldn't take your word against a skunk, I guess, as far as we're concerned, he is still Pierre the trapper. And good luck to him; he's a man, and that's more than I can say for you."

In impotent rage the half-breed rushed out of the room. Then young McIntyre turned from the window, through which he had been gazing down the white miles of Grand Lac Pierre, and reached for Bolton's right hand.

"John," he said huskily, "it was hard for you to do it, but I knew you would."

"I could do no more for a man who took the chance he did to save our lives," replied Bolton.

"Did he suspect us of being police?"

"Yes, but he took the risk of bringing us in just the same."

"When did you first get the idea who he was? It

never entered my mind that Hertel would have done what he did when there was a price on his head."

"Two days back on the trail he said something that made me suspicious. He tried to draw me out. For cool nerve I've never seen his equal. I believe Walker deserved what he got, and I hope they never get him, for he's a man."

"What are you going to report, John?"

"I'm going to report to the chief at Ottawa that a Frenchman answering the description of François Hertel was found by Harricanaw Crees frozen on the Abitibi trail. Is that right, Mac?"

"That's right!" And the government men sealed the compact with a grip.

Spring had wandered north to the Height-of-Land. The ice, honeycombed by the May sun, had already left a thousand lakes. Choked streams, whitening into cascades and wild rapids on their way to the sea, sang madly of soft days that June would bring. Birch ridges shimmered in pale green above valleys aflower, and the buds of willow and alder reddened the river shores while every breeze roamed heavy with wood odors. On spruce spire and balsam top the throats of thrush, warbler, and whitethroat swelled with the joy of the young year.

But in the heavy heart of François Hertel leaped no answering chord of joy as he journeyed by lake and portage and river trail to the headwaters of the St. Maurice. In his fur pack were two skins of the silver fox and many of marten, mink, and otter. Fate

had been kind to his lonely winter trapping, for he brought to the spring trade a rare winter's hunt; but it mattered little to him how rich was his fur pack, for he was not bringing it to Marie at Coocoocache. Marie—how often he had lived over again the black days of his home-coming the year before! Night after night, day after day, throughout the long snows of the bitter winter, as he smoked by his lonely fire or followed his trap lines, he had thought and thought of the days that would come no more to him and Marie. Like a wolf they had driven him, an outcast, into the wilderness, and what had they done with her? The thought that her body, undiscovered, might still await decent burial seared into his brain.

Day by day as he pushed on through the forest, waking with life, to the headwater lakes of the great river, one idea obsessed him: that never again would he turn the bend above Coocoocache to behold Marie waiting on the shore for his return. All that was passed forever. All hope and life and love were gone now from François Hertel, outlaw, hunted from Timiskaming to the Labrador border for the killing of the black-hearted drunkard, Walker.

Such had been the thoughts that daily, through the long winter, had become his ceaseless torment, which companioned him on his long voyage; and with such was his brain tortured when, at last, he reached the waters of the St. Maurice.

He had resolved to go to Lost Lake Post to trade his fur and then to Coocoocache secretly. From there he would journey on down the river, even to the settle-

ments, in search of her grave. McCready was his tried friend and could give him the news of the posts hundreds of miles below.

How he longed to see his island again and the pitiful cross he had placed over the ruins of his home! He wanted to talk to the factor's wife of Marie and the happy days that were dead. He would bring sod from the post stockade, forest flowers and wild shrubs, and make his sacred ground beautiful. It would be her wish, for in life she had loved them so. And each spring, if he were alive, he would come, even from the uttermost north, and keep the forest from encroaching on his altar; and she, looking down from heaven, would see him and know he had not forgotten.

So one day in early June the canoe of François Hertel grated on the beach at Lost Lake Post.

"Upon my soul, François Hertel, where did you come from? I thought you'd be up on Hudson's Bay by this time!" gasped McCready as Hertel walked into the trade-house.

"I come long way, but not from de Bay. I go to Coocoocache."

"Coocoocache?" cried the astonished Scotchman. "Man, are you crazy? They've offered a reward of a thousand dollars for you, dead or alive. You might run into government people down there on the Transcontinental."

"I have met dem before," and Hertel's set mouth relaxed into a smile.

"I know, François, but they're not all cowards.

Some are good men, and you don't want to walk into trouble," pleaded the factor.

" Well, I go to Coocoocache, jes' de same. I wan' to know eef dey found—Marie," and, in spite of his efforts to control his emotion, the deep-set eyes of the voyageur went misty with tears as he uttered his wife's name.

" The winter packet brought no news of her," said McCready gently, " only this government order for your arrest. They may be waiting at Coocoocache now on the very chance of your showing up there this spring."

" I mus' go. Eet ees no matter—my life—now. Dey mus' found her down riviere somewhere. I mus' go to her grave."

" Well, I suppose you'll go, anyway, but travel by night and don't hang around Coocoocache; the railroad people will hear of it and try to get you. This thing will blow over in a year or so if you keep out of the way."

So Hertel traded his fur with McCready and left for Coocoocache.

It was a soft afternoon on which he neared the bend in the river above the post. A few hours before he had passed, at a distance, the construction camp and contractors' shacks at the End-of-Steel, now moved miles above the location of the previous summer. Doubtless, thinking him a travelling Cree, they had paid him no attention.

As Hertel neared the bluff which shut from his view the buildings of the post below and the island

with its lonely cross, a great wave of grief overwhelmed him kneeling at his paddle. His head sank forward on his chest while his shoulders shook with the emotion that engulfed him. For a space he remained with head bowed, in the attitude of prayer, as the canoe drifted inshore. Then, when the paroxysm passed, he shook the black hair from his eyes and, straightening up, resumed paddling. But as he neared the turn of the river his moving lips framed the words again and again: " Ma pauvre Marie! Ma pauvre Marie! "

In a moment the post and island broke into view. There, with the sun on it, as he had left it a year ago, a hunted man, stood his cross.

Heedless of the danger he ran in being seen, he paddled directly to the island. All that he held most dear, the sacred memories of the happy weeks he had spent there with her, all that love had meant to him, was symbolized by that pitiful spruce cross on which was burned the name: " Marie Hertel."

Here the agony of months of solitary brooding, the torture of a year of despair, overwhelmed the heart-broken trapper, and, throwing himself on the ground, one arm around the base of the cross, he gave himself up to his grief. Later, at sunset, he crossed to the post.

" François Hertel, or I'm no Scotchman! " cried the surprised factor as Hertel entered the trade-house.

" Bonjour, ma fr'en'; I have come back." The men warmly gripped hands.

"But don't you know there's a reward for you? The government people may show up any time, looking for you. You can't stay here, man." The factor seemed greatly excited.

"I come to fin' weder dey found her down riviere. I go to see her grave." Hertel had but one thought.

Suddenly there were sounds of women's voices in the stockade outside. Then a white figure flew through the door, open-armed, and upon François Hertel's ears fell a voice as though from the hushed valley of death.

"François, mon cher François!"

Hertel turned to behold the beloved face of his lost wife Marie, while two warm woman's arms circled his neck and soft lips kissed him again and again between her sobs.

Trembling with surprise and joy, the strong man, suddenly transported from dumb despair to mad delight, cried like a child as time and again he held his wife from him to look at her, then crushed her to his heart. In a chair the factor's wife wept silently, while the big Scotchman rubbed his eyes with red fists as he smiled at the reunited lovers.

It was long before Hertel could talk coherently, so great was his emotion. At last he asked:

"But w'ere deed you go dat night dey los' you? Philippe and me, we hunt de shore far below de Vermilion for you. We t'ot you drown or dead in de bush. Oh, ma cherie, I have suffer so in de heart!"

With her arms around his neck Marie related how she had escaped from Walker and put out into the river in an old canoe without a paddle. Carried by the swift current far down the river, the canoe somehow passed the first rapids without swamping. At daylight, many miles below the post, she landed, but, fearing Walker, had decided to attempt to reach the settlement at La Tuque. A day later, starved and exhausted, she was picked up by Vermilion River Crees, who told her she could not reach La Tuque alone because of the rapids. With them she remained until December, when they brought her by dog-team to La Tuque when they came in to trade. There she learned of the return of Hertel and the death of Walker. In the early spring she had come to the post hoping to get word to him if he were still in the St. Maurice country.

When Marie finished her story the factor handed Hertel a letter.

" This came in the spring mail, François," he said.

As Hertel could not read English, the factor opened it and read:

" In March last it was reported to the authorities at Ottawa that the body of François Hertel had been found frozen on the Abitibi trail by Harricanaw Crees. Pierre, the trapper, who was at Flying Post, on Grand Lac, in January must trade his fur in the James Bay country for a year or two."

The letter was signed: " A friend of Pierre."

" Ah-hah," exclaimed Hertel, smiling, " Meester Bolton has pay hees debt! To-morrow, Marie, we

leeve for de far nord, and dees tam, and alway', you travel in de bow of de canoe of François Hertel," and he took her into his great arms.

WHEN THE PRINCE CAME HOME

WHEN THE PRINCE CAME HOME

THE door of the trade-house at Rupert was thrown open, admitting a blast of biting air and a flurry of powdery snow, followed by the rugged figure of Bruce Cristy, son of the factor.

"The Queen of Sheba's pups have come, father," he cried, "and Michel says they're the likeliest-looking litter he's ever seen at Rupert House."

The factor, grinning with pleasure, reached for his foxskin cap. "We'll have a look at 'em. It's time we had some good dogs at Rupert."

Now the Queen, an Ungava-bred husky, bought when a puppy from a Whale River Eskimo, was far and away the best sled-dog at the post, and the pride of the big Scotchman. Massive of bone and frame, with the stamina of a caribou, she had won, as a yearling, a place in the traces of the Hudson's Bay Company's winter packet that took the mail north up the east coast. Therefore, it was with high hope that Cristy floundered over the narrow dog-trail in the deep snow to an unoccupied shack behind the trade-house.

In the open door of the building stood two of the shaggy veterans of the mail-teams, peering curiously with wolfish eyes into the interior, while from a deep

throat within a low, menacing rumble, like the muffled threats of a September northwester gathering on James Bay, held them at the threshold. For there was not a slant-eyed husky at Rupert House that had not felt the white fangs of the Queen, who long since had asserted her sovereignty by right of the power that lay in the lunge and slash of her punishing jaws.

As the factor and his son entered the shack, the growl changed to a whine of recognition from the great dog, who lay on some old sacking in the corner, with six blind, whimpering balls of fur.

"Well, Queenie, old girl, you've sure done yourself proud," chuckled the delighted Cristy, patting the head that sought his hand. "Let's have a look at the family."

One after another he picked up the squealing puppies, his practised fingers sensing the bone and build of each as if he were fit already for the collar and traces of the winter trails.

"Hello! Here's one that's the picture of the old lady herself," he continued, lifting a squirming puppy for inspection.

"Look! He's got the same white star on his chest, and the four white socks," cried Bruce.

"Yes, and in bone and build he's the best of the lot," added his father. "I guess we'll name him Prince right here, for he's got the right to the title. Some day he'll lead the winter packet a day ahead of time into Whale River, and Mackay'll have to find a new joke. We'll have some sled-dogs worth their whitefish at Rupert yet, lad."

That year the spring came early to Rupert Land. The melting snow of April brought to the huskies a swift release from the winter's thraldom to collar and traces, and snow-shoes were discarded by the little colony for the slush-proof sealskin boot. Then the ice began to boom and churn and grind day after day past the post to the salt bay. The great river, swollen by the floods from far Mistassini, crept foot by foot up the high shores until it seethed and hissed almost at the level from which, for two centuries, the brave little fort had hurled a mute defiance at the sullen north. Bound for the marshes of the west coast, long lines of gray geese, led by veteran couriers of the air, crossed like caravans the blue desert of the sky. White hosts of wavies, their snowy wings flapping in the sun's rays like huge banners, passed high overhead to their nesting-places in nameless arctic islands. In the wake of the gray and the white squadrons came the little brothers of the air, duck and yellow-legs, warbler and thrush. And soon, from the neighboring forest, piped the heralds of soft days in Rupert Land.

With the waxing of the spring the sons and daughters of the Queen grew into hulking, leggy puppies, always in the way of every one, including themselves. But reckless indeed of the safety of his throat would have been the half-breed who kicked them from his path while the restless, narrow eyes of the Queen kept vigilant watch. And it was not long before the puppy with the white socks and star-emblazoned chest began to realize the promise of his earliest youth. Soon his fiercer spirit, aided by the might of his stur-

dier build, brought his kinsmen into subjection, and he became the acknowledged leader in every puppy plot and misadventure about the trade-house and factor's quarters.

It was the Prince who was found under the trade-house endeavoring to bolt Cristy's best pair of sealskin boots. It was the Prince who, unobserved, gnawed into a bag of flour, and on appearing before his family, an apparition in white, was set upon fiercely by his kinsmen in a body, who failed to recognize him in his new rôle of purity. Not until he had administered to them a sound drubbing, in the course of which activity he lost his disguise, was he readmitted to membership in the family circle. Again, it was the Prince who, at the tender age of three months, demonstrated to the half-wild tom-cat of the Cristys that a husky pup with a star on his chest and the teeth of an otter was not to be cuffed with impunity. Thereafter, Lynx curled a tail somewhat shorter than he formerly wore, and affected a decided hitch in his gait.

But though the Prince soon acquired a reputation for a peppery temper and the love of a brawl, Bruce Cristy early discovered that he, alone, of the children of the Queen, not even momentarily could be lured from the side of his master by coaxing or bribery. Early he acquired the trick of rushing full-tilt at Bruce, in his lumbering puppy gait, yelping as he ran, only, on reaching him, to seize a hand in his open jaws, and raising his slant eyes, to wait with fiercely wagging tail for the other hand to grasp his nose and roll him on his wriggling back.

So the northern summer passed, and with the first bite in the air came the gray and the white squadrons from the north to feed on the succulent goose-grass of the south coast marshes. Under Bruce the Company Indians manned the goose-boats and left for the annual hunt on Hannah Bay for the winter's supply. With the exception of Cristy and some of the older post Crees, Rupert House was devoid of men.

It was a soft, lazy afternoon at the end of September—weather which always precedes the cold storm that ushers in the Indian summer on the bay. A week of the latter and the stinging winds would sweep down from the north, bringing the brant and the first flurry of snow. The dogs of the factor's mail-teams were sprawled around the trade-house, asleep in the sun. But sleep this golden afternoon was not for the offspring of the Queen. Vainly, under the lead of the Prince, master of sports, they had romped from trade-house to river shore, and back to the spruce forest in the rear, in search of adventure. They had pawed and pulled at the inert anatomy of the Queen, only to be met with dire threats of chastisement in the form of low growls and lazy exposure of white canines as her head fell again in sleep. At last, in desperation, the hulking Prince picked up a bleached caribou shinbone, and shaking it as he would a rabbit, challenged his comrades to take it.

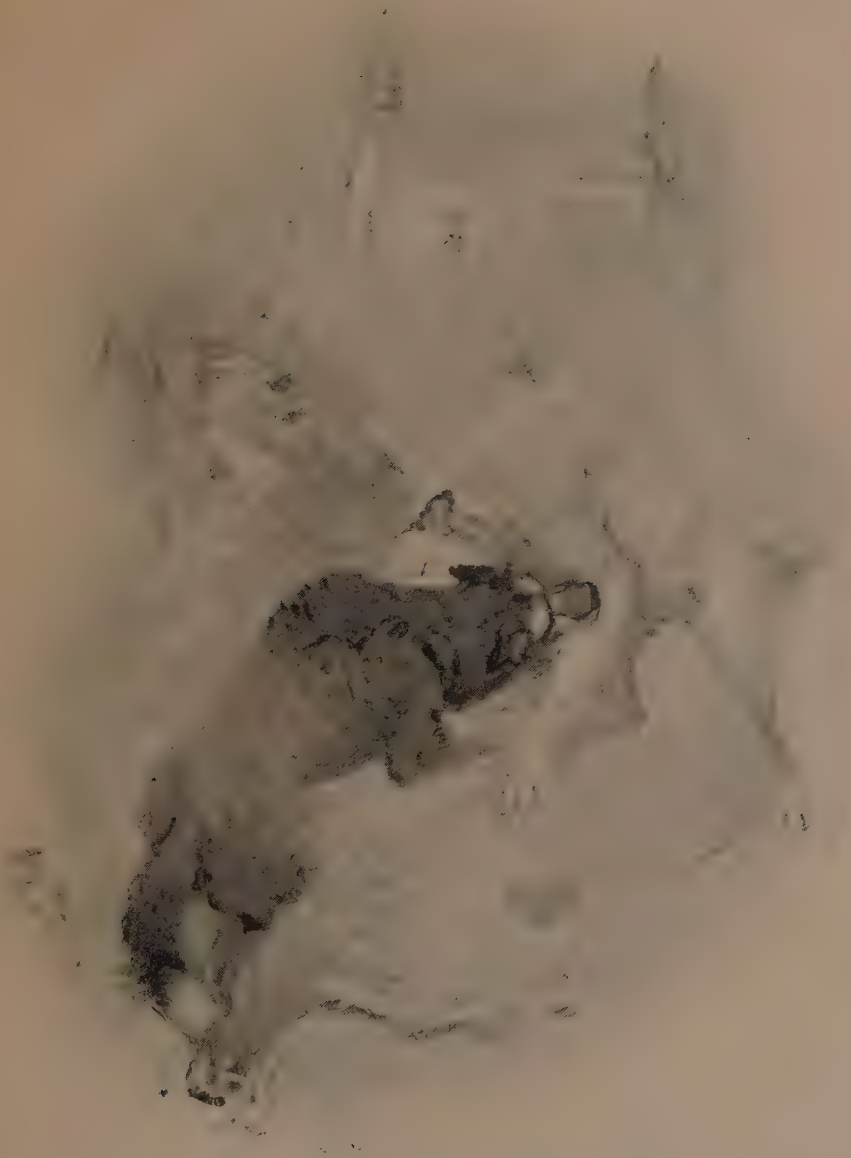
With yelps of delight the pursuit began. Pell-mell around the trade-house went the pack at the heels of the big puppy. Back again they came, scrambling over each other in wild confusion as they slid down

the steep river bank in full cry. Then up again and over to the forest raced the squealing huskies, hard in pursuit of one too fleet to be overtaken. Soon, out of the forest galloped the Prince, and headed for the trade-house. Arriving there, he stopped and allowed his nearest pursuers to come almost within reach, then, shaking his bone in their faces, he fled up the river shore toward the mission and the cabins of the post Indians a few hundred yards off.

The puppy had not covered half the distance when from the grass back of the mission-house rose a big white husky, opening his red mouth in a wide yawn as he stretched. For a moment he surveyed the authors of the bedlam which had wakened him; then, with ears erect and hair on neck bristling, began to walk slowly through the long grass toward the oncoming puppies. Farther away, near the Indian shacks, other huskies rose, shook themselves, and turned in quest of the cause of this ruthless interference with their slumbers.

When the Prince and his pursuers had covered half the distance to the mission-house, the white sentinel watching them threw back his head and roused the post with the long-drawn call to arms of the half-wild descendants of the timber-wolves.

The challenge of the white husky stopped the romping puppies in their tracks. Young as they were, they already knew the meaning of the slogan. Sensing the peril into which their heedless crossing of the post dead-line had placed them, they turned and fled for the safety of the trade-house. At the same time the Prince, far in front of his pursuing comrades,



THE PRINCE SLASHED WITH HIS SHARP TEETH

stopped, dropped his bone, and, with ears pricked and hair on neck and back stiffly erect, stood for an instant watching the white husky, who, as he trotted toward him, repeated the long howl of battle.

Immediately from the Indian shacks came the answer of the supporting columns. Then realizing the fate in store for a half-grown husky from the factor's quarters, caught alone near the mission-house, he lifted his head with a yelp of defiance and turned back. But the delay due to this momentary act of bravado cost him dear. As they raced, the white dog, followed at a distance by his comrades, gained on the puppy at every bound. Now he crossed the frontier, but the trade-house still lay two hundred yards away. On came the big husky, yelping as he ran, until hardly a hundred feet separated them. Then, aware of the hopelessness of his attempt to escape, the puppy gave poignant proof of the blood royal that raced in his veins. Suddenly swerving, he checked himself, and, crouching with head lowered and feet braced widely apart, the fighting rage of a hundred wolfish forebears blazing in his narrow eyes, he awaited the rush of the white husky with a snarl.

The big dog, surprised at being met jaw-to-jaw by his quarry, whom he anticipated pulling down from behind, and unable to stop himself, leaped as he reached the puppy, while the Prince, springing forward at the same instant, slashed with his sharp teeth a deep gash in the white body as it passed over him. Gathering himself like a flash, the big dog turned and jumped back, sinking his long fangs into the shoulder

of the infuriated son of the Queen. But no yelp of fear or pain left the throat of the puppy as he closed in what would have been a death-grapple with his heavier and more skilful adversary, had not, at the instant that the white husky's superior weight bore him down, a gray streak shot through the air from behind, and a great slate-gray body catapulted into the white one, rolling it over and over, while punishing fangs slashed again and again into the white shoulders and chest, seeking the throat. Then, over the three, like tides on a reef, the yelping pack from the Cree cabins, and the sled-dogs of the mail-teams, hurrying to support the Queen, met. Instantly there arose over Rupert House the wild din of two-score huskies, mad with the lust for blood, battling to the death.

Leaving the white husky gasping out his life through a ripped throat, the Queen, infuriated with the sight of the blood of her own body welling from the wounds of her puppy, stood over him, fighting like a demon. Lunging, slashing right and left with her knife-like fangs, she battled with her comrades against overwhelming odds, for the life of her son. But, though the dogs of the mail-teams were far outnumbered, they were picked animals, chosen for strength and endurance, veterans of a score of similar frays, and fighting together, as is their custom, they were more than holding their own, when the big factor, striking right and left with an axe-helve in each hand, sprang into the middle of the yelping, blood-smeared riot of enraged huskies. Yet not until reinforced by the Crees left at the post, and after a mer-

ciless use of the club, did Cristy finally separate the maddened brutes and stop the fight. Snarling their smothered rage as they limped, at times stopping to lick their wounds, slowly the dogs of the Crees were driven to their quarters. And behind them in the grass they left the stiffening bodies of five of their number that never again would mingle in fur-post brawl.

The battle over, Cristy turned anxiously to the Queen, who lay, oblivious to her own wounds, beside the limp body of her son, washing with her healing tongue the ugly slashes in chest and shoulder.

"How did this thing start, Antoine? I wouldn't lose this puppy for a dozen black-fox skins," he asked his half-breed clerk as he carried the torn body of the Prince to the trade-house.

"First tam I hear de husky shout, I look and I see de white dog chase de Prince pup. De oders run, but de pup he stop and mak' fight. Den de Queen, she travel lak timber-wolf for de white husky. Dat Prince, he ver' cross for a pup. I tink he mak' some beeg fight w'en he grow up; pull de sled lak bull-moose."

"So it was the Queen who killed the white husky?"

"Ah-hah! She keel heem lak he was snow-shoe rabbit."

When they had washed and dressed the wounds of the Prince, they placed him on the sacking in the shack where he had come into the world. There the Queen, hurt but superficially, kept guard night and day. Then the goose-boats returned from the Bay

with their feathered freight of gray geese, wavy, and brant.

On hearing the news, Bruce hurried to his hurt puppy. In the doorway of the shack stood the Queen, who put her great paws on his chest in an endeavor to lick his face; then led him to the sacking in the corner of the room. At the sound of Bruce's voice, the fevered puppy raised his head with a feeble yelp, struggling to get to his feet, but his bandaged chest and shoulders held him helpless, so he lay with wrinkling nose extended toward his master, his bushy tail beating the floor.

The stalwart young Scot, with more than a suspicion of mist in his eyes, kneeling, pressed his bronzed face against that of the overjoyed puppy.

" So they chewed up my Prince pup, did they? " he whispered into a pointed ear. " Well, they got what they deserved. He fought the white husky with the red eyes, didn't he? Yes, he did. Another year and they won't bother this pup much, I guess not."

Under the careful nursing of Bruce the wounds of the Prince soon healed, but the November snows had whitened the wastes of Rupert Land before he had regained his strength, and the winter was far advanced when his chest could bear the pull and drag of his first collar and harness.

With June returned the red fur-hunters from the upper Rupert and Nottaway river country to trade at the post. Tepees now dotted the cleared ground, while bark canoes like mushrooms covered the shore;

and the buoys of nets set for the whitefish that came in with the flood-tide, floated in lines on the river's surface. Rupert House had suddenly awakened with life and color. By day the swarthy children of the forest traded their winter's hunt of fur for the supplies of the Great Company, or lounged around the trade-house, smoking and exchanging the gossip of the north. At twilight the laughter of women and the voices of children at play filled the air, for the dread moons of the long snow, with their cold and famine, were passed and the days of plenty at hand.

One evening two French half-breeds, lean from privation, with clothes and moccasins worn to ribbons, turned a shattered Peterborough canoe into the post. The strangers said that in the previous summer they had crossed the Height-of Land from the Lake St. John country, by way of the Roberval River and the Sinking Lakes, on the Labrador border, where they had trapped their furs. It was the most valuable winter's hunt that two men had brought to the post in the memory of the oldest Indian, and the suspicions of Cristy were aroused.

Part of their furs the breeds traded for a canoe, provisions, and ammunition, but refused to barter the foxskins. This convinced the factor that they intended to return to Lake St. John, where the free traders would pay them cash.

One morning Rupert House waked to find the strangers gone. That night when Bruce fed the sled-dogs, the Prince was missing. Then he knew that the

husky had been taken from Rupert in the canoe of the half-breeds.

Quickly the post was aroused. Gathering his best voyageurs in the trade-room, Cristy addressed them in Cree.

"The last sleep the strangers from the south left Rupert House. With them they took the light of my eyes. And the heart of my son is sad. They journeyed far to trade their furs at the Big Water. This they did because they feared the heavy hands of the fathers at Ottawa, for they have broken the law. To-night a canoe takes the river trail to Mistassini, another follows the coast to Moose, and a third journeys up the Big Water to East Main Fort, to bring back these men and the dog, which I prize. There is much flour and tea for the canoe that brings back the dog, and the Company debt of the crew shall be forgotten."

The voyageurs launched the canoes, with supplies for the pursuit, and disappeared in the dusk.

Far into the night the factor and his son sat speculating as to how the thieves had managed to overpower the great puppy and spirit him away without arousing the camp; while at intervals, outside, where the dogs slept in the grass, the deep throat of the Queen voiced her grief at the absence of her son, in a long, mournful howl.

Early in August a packet from Moose Factory, with government despatches from Ottawa, told the story. The posts on the east coast were ordered to arrest two French half-breeds, accused of the murder,

on the upper Roberval, of a Montagnais, and the wounding of several others, in a successful attempt to rob a party of trappers of their winter's hunt.

Then the fur brigade arrived from Mistassini, and with it Michel and his tattered voyageurs. They had searched the length of the Rupert and the Marten Lakes trail to the south, but only once had found signs of the dog and the fleeing thieves. The factor at Mistassini wrote that he was crippled with rheumatism, and asked for an assistant.

"Well, here's where you get your chance to see some of the Height-of-Land country," said his father, handing Bruce the letter.

Three days later Bruce Cristy bade his family good-bye, and started with the returning fur brigade for the great lake in whose half-mythical waters the white man's paddle had seldom dipped. Stepping into a birch-bark manned by four Crees, he placed his Winchester in its skin case at his feet, and turned grimly to his father, who stood on the shore.

"If they are hunting in the Mistassini country this winter and we don't get them, it won't be because I have hugged the fire at the post; and if I'm ever within rifle-shot and don't burn some powder, it won't be because I've forgotten my dog."

"Good-bye, lad! Take care of yourself! We'll see you in the summer," called his father as the stalwart youth seized his paddle and gave the signal to start.

The five blades, driven by the toil-hardened backs and shoulders of the crew, churned the water in the wake of the brigade, and the long craft, followed by

cries of "Bo'-jo'! Bo'-jo'!" from the little group of Crees on the shore, shot forward on its three-hundred-mile journey.

On arriving at Mistassini in September, Bruce found the factor Craig unable to walk, so he took active charge of the post. While most of the Crees were as yet in their summer camps on the lakes, curing fish for the winter, he sent canoes warning them to keep a sharp lookout for the renegades from Lake St. John, and promised a reward for the dog. But the couriers returned with no news of the Prince.

In October the stinging winds brought the snow to the lonely post far on the Height-of-Land, and the thoroughfares began to close with the early ice. Then for a month the little settlement was marooned in the snow-swept solitudes, while the ice was making on the wide lakes and swift rivers, strong enough for men and dog-teams to travel. With the coming of the freezing November moon Bruce Cristy left the post with two dog-teams for the Sinking Lakes. Christmas found him still in the forests of the Labrador border, travelling from camp to camp of the Cree and Montagnais trappers who traded at Mistassini, searching for news of two half-breed strangers, and a big husky with star-emblazoned chest. Finally, disheartened after two months' fruitless wandering, he turned back on the Mistassini trail.

It was a bitter January day on the wind-harried level of the great lake, with the air filled with powdery snow that cut the faces of the men like whip-lashes. Gradually the travelled trail, ice-hardened at Christ-

mas by the friction of many feet and runners, filled with drift, and the brisk trot of the dogs slowed to a walk as the light waned and the early dusk crept out from the deeply shadowed spruce shores. Jean, the French Cree driver at the gee-pole of the slowly moving sled, was searching the neighboring forest for a place to camp, while behind him walked Cristy, occupied with his thoughts.

Suddenly the lead-dog yelped, starting the team forward on a trot. Looking up, Bruce saw a dog-team far ahead on the trail.

"It must be our boys," he said. "Stir up those huskies, Jean. Peter may have some news."

The driver cracked his whip at the leader's ears, and the pursuit began. From the first they gained rapidly. Soon hardly a mile separated the teams. Then catching a side view where the trail turned at right angles to round a point of the shore, Cristy's heart leaped, for the sled ahead, on which the driver rode, was drawn by a lone husky.

Bruce gripped the arm of the Cree. "There's only one dog on that sled, Jean! Come on!" Springing in front of the team, he ran up the trail.

At Cristy's approach the huddled figure on the sled gave no sign. At intervals an arm rose and fell, lashing the dog forward to the unequal task. Hardly a rifle-shot separated them when the exhausted dog, after repeated attempts to drag the sled through a drift, lay down on the trail. Again the whip rose and fell, rose and fell, but the husky did not move. Slowly the driver got up from the sled, and reeling

forward struck the dog savagely on the head with the butt of the whip, then, carried off his balance by the blow, fell headlong to the snow at the dog's side. Like a flash the husky turned, and before the man could regain his feet lunged at his throat, forcing him, struggling, backward upon the trail. Once, twice, three times the fangs of the maddened brute tore at the throat of the helpless driver. Then, while the infuriated beast still worried the crumpled figure in the snow, Bruce reached them.

The gaunt husky, baring his white fangs with a snarl, turned from the lifeless body. Raising his massive head, across which, from nose to ears, ran great welts left by the dog-whip, he glared with narrow, bloodshot eyes at the new enemy. And on the shaggy chest the frozen ooze from a harness-sore stained with a crimson smear a large white star.

"Prince! Prince! Don't you know me, boy?" cried his master, dropping his fur mittens, and reaching out with palms upward toward the angered dog, whose blood was still hot with the rage of battle.

The husky, expecting a blow from a dog-whip, and receiving no attack, stood for an instant confused. But the approach of the yelping team again aroused his fighting blood, and he faced around in his traces to defend himself, hair on back bristling.

"Good old Prince! Don't you remember me, boy? Don't you remember the Queen, the Queen, your old mother, Prince?"

Gradually, as Bruce repeated the words once so familiar to the wanderer, the bared fangs were cov-

ered. The pointed ears of the husky laid back against the skull, slowly righted themselves as the soothing tones of the voice he once loved stirred the ghosts of vague memories of other days, blurred by months of cruelty and starvation.

As his lost master continued to talk, the dog thrust forward his bruised muzzle and, with ears pricked, sniffed at Bruce's hand.

"Good old Prince! We've found him at last!" Bruce continued, his fingers now touching the extended nose of the puzzled dog. Then with a long whiff memory returned, and the husky recognized the beloved hand of his master of the happy days.

With a yelp, the starved Prince, fore feet uplifted, threw himself at Bruce. A pair of strong arms circled the shaggy neck, and a wind-burnt face sought the scarred head, while into a furry ear, amid whines of delight, were poured the things a man says only to his dog.

A slash of the knife freed the Prince from the harness. Kneeling on his snow-shoes, Cristy ran his fingers over the lumps and bruises on the great emaciated body that told the story of long months of slavery under brutal masters. Finding no broken bones, he turned to the dead man in the snow who had paid so dearly for every welt. For a moment, as Bruce gazed at the face, distorted in death, with glazed, sunken eyes staring sightless into the bitter night, pity held him; until the touch of a battered nose seeking his hand again hardened his heart.

"When their grub gave out," said Bruce, "I sup-

pose he knifed the other one and started for the post."

They buried the murderer in the deep snow of the shore and left him to the tender mercies of his kind, the furred assassins of the forest. Then they made camp and fed the famished dog.

When the Prince had regained his strength, back at the post, Bruce decided not to wait until the thoroughfares cleared for canoe travel in May, but to leave for home on the first crust.

So one March afternoon found the Prince leading the dog-team slowly over the lump ice marking the long stretch of the Kettle Rapids, far down the Rupert River. Whirlpools, shoots, and cross-currents, defying the inexorable cold long after the swift river closes elsewhere, keep the Rupert House trail broken here until January. Then, succumbing to the fierce temperature of the midwinter nights, the rapids freeze throughout their length in irregular mounds and ridges.

For an hour they had been hugging the shore, avoiding the treacherous footing of midstream. At last, on turning a bend, the white shell of the Rupert again stretched level before them.

With a cheery "Marche, Prince!" Cristy broke into the snow-shoe swing, half-walk, half-trot, which eats up the miles as does no gait on bare ground. In answer to the command, the willing leader started the team at a fast trot. Out into mid-river, where the going was good on the hard crust, swung Cristy, followed by his dogs. Then, as they left the foot of the

rapids, without warning the ice sank under them, plunging driver and yelping dogs into the water.

With a few powerful strokes Cristy fought his way to the sound ice. Behind him, the Prince and the second dog struggled desperately against the drag of the sinking sled, holding the rear dogs under. Supporting himself with one arm, Bruce called to the panting husky, straining every nerve to reach his master. "Come on, Prince! Come on, Prince!" he cried, working desperately with numbed fingers to get at his knife. Then the swift current carried sled and helpless huskies down-stream under the struggling Prince, momentarily easing the strain on the traces which bound him to them, and he reached and got his fore feet on the ice at his master's side. At the same instant Cristy freed his knife from its sheath. And as sled and drowning dogs were sucked under the ice, and the nails of the Prince's clinging fore feet slipped slowly toward the edge, while the doomed dog voiced his despair in a smothered whine, the traces were slashed.

Freed from the deadly weight, with a heave of his shoulders the husky raised himself half out of water, when the body of his master at his side furnished a foothold for a hind leg, and the dog was out.

Stiffening under the paralyzing chill and hampered by skin capote and snow-shoes, Cristy was weakening rapidly, when the Prince, sensing his master's peril, braced himself at the slippery edge of the firm ice and seized an arm in his strong teeth. Then as he strained for a foothold, with fore legs planted wide apart and

nails biting deep into the treacherous surface, the thick back of the great husky bowed slowly into an arc, and the freezing man was dragged to safety.

The dazed Cristy got to his feet and staggered to the shore, where he stood for a while staring helplessly at the grave of his faithful huskies. At length he turned to the dog at his side, who held in his half-open jaws his master's unmittened hand, begging with beating tail for recognition.

Silently the man knelt and, seizing in his arms the shaggy neck, crushed his face against the great head.

"We're square now, boy. I won't forget and you won't forget," he said hoarsely, as the happy Prince sat motionless. "But we're a hundred miles from home, boy, and not an ounce of grub, or a blanket, and the wind's risin', and it'll go twenty below before daylight. It's travel day and night for us if we ever see Rupert again, and there'll be no white-fish and tea and bannocks on the way."

For answer, a cold nose and a hot red tongue sought the man's face, while the shivering Cristy threw off his ice-caked capote and squeezed the water as best he could from his freezing clothes.

Then man and dog, side by side, started down the desolate river guarded by the pitiless hills, in the race against cold and starvation. Somewhere below, he knew there was an old Company cache. The bitter wind, drawing up-stream between the ridges, was strengthening. No man might face its stinging drive that night and save his face and hands. Already the blood was leaving his fingers in the frozen

THE FREEZING MAN WAS DRAGGED TO SAFETY

mittens. So he hurried to make the cache before the dusk.

White mile after mile the man and dog left behind them, but no sign of the cache. Cristy wondered if he had passed it, buried in the snow. It had been there in the fall, not far below the Kettle Rapids, and he must find it soon. He was travelling head down to avoid the sting of the wind, but his fingers might go at any time, and he thought of what that would mean.

Finally, he decided to plunge into the first timbered hollow and make camp. What a mockery that would be for man and dog—without food! Still, a roaring fire would help. But without an axe? Unless he found down timber, he couldn't hope for much of a fire without an axe, and the night would be bitter. The heart of the half-frozen youth sank. He thought of the family at Rupert that would not know his fate until the spring canoe from Mistassini reached the post with the news that he had left the lake in March. Or possibly the sled with the dogs would be washed ashore and found by the Nemiskau Crees on their way to the spring trade. So he mused as his snow-shoes crunched the brittle crust.

Then he pulled himself together. Men had travelled in the north farther without food, and in midwinter, too, when the wind was worse, and the nights forty and fifty below. Out of the wind it wouldn't be so bad. A thaw was due any time, and the wind never blows long in March in the north. But they must get into the first thick spruce soon,

or —— Then, half buried in the snow on the shore, he saw the cache.

"Come on, boy!" he cried, and shortly was shovelling an entrance through the low door. Inside, some snow had drifted through chinks in the walls, but the roof was wind-proofed by the crust; and his spirits rose, for there at the end of the shack stood a rusty tent stove.

When he had gathered birch-bark and dry spruce sticks, his stiffened fingers fumbled for his match-box. With an exclamation of fear he swiftly searched each of his pockets. As he did, the lean face went pale under the weather-tanned skin. Turning to the dog, he cried:

"The matches went down with the sled, boy! We're done for! We'll never see Rupert now!"

As a last resort, he carefully explored the shack, but it had been unused for years, and he found no matches, but stumbled upon what the wood-mice had left of an old Company blanket. Again he searched the room for that which meant warmth and life, but in vain.

Then the desperate youth set to work banking in the walls of the cache with snow to make it wind-proof. This accomplished, he sealed the low doorway and prepared to fight through the bitter hours for his life. His woolen clothes, thanks to the severe exercise, were partially dry; so were the socks he wore next his feet. The outer ones he took off, kneaded until they were soft, wrung out what moisture he could, and put on again.

Scraping and pounding the ice from the heavy coat of the Prince, who, owing to the thick under-fur of soft hair and the hardihood of his breed, was immune to cold, Cristy made the dog lie down, and wrapping the blanket around them, clasped the great body closely to his own. Through the bitter hours the warmth of the dog's body alone kept the heart of his master beating and the blood moving in his feet and hands.

At last the blue March dawn broke over the cache on the Rupert, and with it the wind fell. Later the rising sun overtook on the river trail a traveller with a ragged blanket slung on his back, and a slate-gray husky. Once the dog ran ahead, and turning, rushed yelping back to take in his jaws a mittened hand, and march, swishing a bushy tail, beside the man as if urging him to a faster pace. But the traveller, with head down and haggard eyes, swung stiffly on at the same stride, for Rupert House lay ninety white miles away, and one who starves must save his strength.

Three days later old Michel opened the door of the trade-house at Rupert, stepped into the caribou thongs of his snow-shoes, and shuffled up the high river shore toward his cabin. At last the winter was breaking. The strong March sun, reflected from the sparkling white level of river and bay, fairly blinded the eyes. The tough old breed had not deigned to slip on the rabbit-skin mitts that hung from his neck by a cord, and in the sun his cap of cross-fox with its bushy tail dangling jauntily behind seemed too warm.

Yet lately the nights had been bitter, with much wind. In a week, perhaps, the snow would melt a little each day at noon, to freeze hard again at sunset. Then in a few sleeps would come the big March thaw, and the trails would close for a moon. So he mused as his snow-shoes lazily creaked on the crust.

Suddenly the tall figure stopped in its tracks, a lean hand shading the keen eyes.

"Ah-hah!"

The exclamation was followed by a long silence as he stood, motionless, gazing up the river.

"Cree comin'!" he muttered after a time, and shortly added, "De rabbit, he give out in hees countree for sure."

With narrowed eyes still shaded, the watcher followed the moving spots on the snow far up the river trail.

"Ver' strange ting!" he finally said aloud. "He travel all over de riviere lak' he seek wid 'mal de tête.'" The old man slowly shook his head. "De husky, why he jump de trail? Ver' strange ting!"

Presently the approaching objects on the wide river further enlightened the keen eyes.

"Ah-hah!" This time with more vehemence, for the black spots were beginning to assume shape. "Dere ees no sled. De Cree starve out for sure."

Nearer came the one seeking the succor of Rupert House from the pitiless north. Then the old man expelled his breath with a long "Hah!" The mystery of the uncertain course of the stranger was solved.

"Snow-blind!" he said, and turned back to the

trade-house, to reappear with the factor and two Company men.

"A snow-blind Cree, with a lone husky, you say, Michel?" inquired Cristy, his eyes following the pointing finger.

"Snow-blind, right enough, and starved, poor devil! Tnere he goes off the trail now. Why, the dog's pulling him back; he's leading him. He's hitched to the husky."

For a moment, in silence, they watched the uncertain progress of man and dog. Then the factor exclaimed:

"There, he's gone down! Michel, harness a team to the cariole! We'll go and get him."

Stunned, or too weak to rise, the snow-blind stranger lay where he fell, while the dog nosed the prostrate form. Then the husky threw back his head and roused the dogs of Rupert House with a long howl.

Cristy and a post half-breed were rapidly approaching when the fallen man, with an effort, got to his feet and, clinging to a trace that circled the dog's neck, again staggered forward. The big husky, excited by the answering howls of the post dogs appearing from all directions, dragged his reeling master up the trail. On came the strange pair, stricken voyageur and faithful dog, but as Cristy reached them, the legs of the man doubled under him and he lurched forward on the snow. With a whine the husky turned to the motionless figure. Then he faced the strangers with a warming growl, and the astonished Cristy saw on his broad chest a large white star.

"Prince! By heaven, it's the pup!" cried the amazed factor.

On guard, over the body of his master, whose face was invisible, the huge husky, narrow eyes blazing, held the two men in their tracks.

"Don't y' know me, Prince? Good old Prince!" coaxed Cristy, reaching a hand toward the dog, who stood perplexed by the voice of the factor and the familiar white buildings grouped on the shore ahead.

With a moan, the one in the snow turned and raised himself on an elbow. Across the lean, bearded face a strip of torn shirt was bound, to shield the inflamed eyes from the sun-glare on the crust. A mittenless hand, blue from frost-bite, reached up and touched the dog. Then the wanderer said weakly:

"I hear the huskies—Prince. We must be home—at last!"

"Bruce! Bruce! my lad!" cried his father, rushing to his stricken son.

With a bound the dog met the factor half-way, but the great fangs did not strike, for he had recognized his old friend.

Tenderly the starved and half-delirious youth was placed in the cariole sled and brought to the post.

Huskies, hurrying from far and near at the challenge from the river, already had been driven away when the Queen appeared. They were climbing the shore trail when she came trotting up to the great dog, who marched beside the cariole sled within reach of his master's hand. The Prince pricked up his ears,

whined uncertainly, and saluted her with a loud bark. With a low rumble of resentment in her throat at the presence at Rupert House of a strange husky whose shoulders topped her own by inches, she gingerly approached nearer. For a moment slant eyes looked into slant eyes, as mother and son stood motionless. Then, yelping wildly, the Prince sprang toward her. Surprised, the Queen stood on the defensive, when her bulky puppy carromed into her shoulders, rolling her over and over; but as they met, her nose, like a flash, caught the glad news. Then there followed a medley of yelps, leaps, caresses, and acrobatic expressions of unbounded canine delight such as Rupert House had witnessed in the memory of no living man. Bereft of their senses, mother and son raced up the high shores, round the trade-house, over the factor's quarters and return, barking like mad.

When Bruce Cristy's mother took him into her arms at the factor's door, there happened to the proud Queen, in the presence of the post, that which no husky before had had either the strength or daring to attempt. Running at her side, the joy-maddened Prince, weakened by three days' fast though he was, suddenly seized the Queen by the back of her great neck and, with a wrench, threw her on the snow. And to the amazement of the onlookers, instead of the swift punishment which they anticipated would be meted out to him for his audacity, his cold nose felt the swift lick of a hot tongue as she gained her feet, and again joined him in a mad frolic.

So did the Queen welcome her lost son.

That night Bruce Cristy lay in bed with snow compresses cooling the inflamed eyes and aching head. While, at intervals, his mother fed him nourishing broth, he briefly told the story of the finding of the Prince, his fight for life at the Kettle Rapids, and the long struggle home without fire or food.

Later, as his worn-out son slept, Cristy tiptoed to the door and, slipping into his snow-shoes, sought the shack behind the trade-house. Softly entering on moccasined feet, he smiled at the picture that the light from the low moon shining through the door revealed. For there, lying sprawled upon the sacking in the corner where he came into the world, lay the wanderer, sleeping deeply after a bountiful supper, while at his side, with her nose resting on the big-boned, hairy fore paws of her son, the Queen kept guard. At times as she slept her deep chest swelled and then contracted as she heaved a contented sigh in her dreams, which were sweet, for at last the Prince had come home.

WITH THE WINTER MAIL

WITH THE WINTER MAIL

For three days the Fort Hope Christmas mail had fought its way through the blizzard that beat down from the Kapiskau barrens upon the frozen Albany. For three days old Pierre, breaking trail through the drifting snow to give footing to his panting dog-team, or swinging his goad of plaited caribou hide from behind the sled while his nephew, Esau, took the lead, had plunged head down into the gale. Stinging like the lash of myriad whips, the pitiless northwester had seamed the frost-blackened faces of the men with cracks, cutting the noses of the laboring huskies until they whined with pain. At times, when the fury of the snow-swirls which enveloped them in a blur of white had sucked their very breath, the men threw themselves gasping beside the ice-coated dogs whose red lips and tongues, to which clung the frozen froth of their hot mouths, alone marked them as living things. Still, hour after hour, they had hurled themselves headlong into the storm. And ever as they had conquered each hard-won mile of the frozen river, the parting words of the factor of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Albany lived again in the ears of the old half-breed—words which had etched themselves into his memory as he left the post, asleep under the stars in the gray dusk of the December morning, to take the long Fort Hope trail.

Whenever, at daylight, the boy had urged that they remain in camp, deep in the shelter of the spruce, until the storm blew itself out, the sting of those last words of the factor had spurred him on as a rowel drives a spent steed. Always his reply had been a hoarse "Marche!" as he struck the lead-dog with an unwonted fierceness that Esau could not comprehend. But old Pierre had not deigned to voice the thoughts that consumed him, and the boy, Indian-like, did not question. So, forcing the huskies to the limit of their endurance and encouraging the lad, who already showed signs of the physical strain of the battle with wind and snow, the old Cree had pushed on and on.

"In canoe or on snow-shoes no better man has served the Company. But you're stiffening up and growing too old to take the winter trail to Fort Hope. It's the toughest trail in the north country, and next year a younger man will go, for the mail must get through on time."

These were the words that for four days had tortured the pride of the old Company servant, repeating and repeating themselves through every white mile of the shifting, drift-barred trail. He recalled, too, how the factor had rested his hand kindly on his shoulder and gripped his fingers at parting as if to lighten the blow—the blow that had been the death-knell of his manhood.

And so at last, he mused, the end had come—the end foretold of late years by recurring twinges of "mal raquette," and stiffened back on portage and river. He had hoped that he had concealed it from

the younger men, but now even the factor knew. Fiercely the pride of the French blood of his father and the stoicism of the Cree had fought for mastery within him through the miles of white silence on the first day out. But in vain he battled with the demons that mocked. The sentence that he knew some day must come to all men had come now to him. So this was his last long trail. At length, age had struck him down as the timber-wolves in winter strike down an old caribou deserted by the herd. A few years of light river work and easy trips with the dogs, and then a seat at the fire with the squaws and old men, remained to him, Pierre Grassette, who, among the swift dog-runners of all the wide North, had met none, half-breed, red man, or white, who could take the trail from him in the days of his youth.

This which he had dreaded above all things; this ignominy which in the last few years he had prayed he might be spared; this rusting out at a post—would be his lot. He had longed to die on the trail, in harness. But his dearest wish was to be denied him, this death of a man, which had overtaken so many of his comrades.

Years before, one still in the flush of early manhood had drowned with the crew of a Company boat in the great gorge of the Abitibi. Another, strong as a young moose, had been frozen with his dogs on the Nepigon trail; a third, stabbed in a brawl at Henley House; but he, the last of them, would rot with garrulous squaws and toothless old men at Fort Albany, a pensioner of the Company.

Time and again, as he urged on young Esau and the dogs, had his thoughts traversed the forty years as man and boy that he had served so faithfully the masters he had never seen, who dwelt far toward the rising sun across the Big Water. Instinctively he had quickened his pace as he remembered how once, on a bet, he had brought the winter mail from Moose to Rupert House, up the east coast, ninety miles as the goose flies, in twenty hours, finishing fresher than his dogs and dancing that night at the Christmas carousal. Not without reason had the Crees of the James Bay country called him " The Man Who Does Not Sleep." Once his fame as a voyageur had travelled from Whale River, in lonely Ungava, down to Norway House, far in the Ojibway country. Into the dark eyes of the old Cree there had flashed momentarily the fire of his lost youth, as he tossed his head with pride at the memories of his prowess in days long dead. Then the words of the factor had banished his dream. " Next year a younger man will go, for the mails must get through on time."

Never had Esau seen such a pace set on snow-shoes as Pierre had made that first clear day out of Albany. Inured to the winter trails though he was, it had taxed his youthful strength to follow the seemingly tireless stride of the old courier. When the night closed in upon them, they had turned the weary huskies to the shore, and with their shoes scooped out a camping-place in the deep snow of the spruce timber, where they pitched their shed-tent as a wind-break and boiled their tea and pemican. As Pierre threw the

rations of frozen whitefish to the hungry dogs, he had accosted the tired lad with a strange glitter in his deep-set eyes:

"Next long snow I t'ink young man not feed de dog at dees place on first sleep from Albanee!" Then he had added almost fiercely: "What you t'ink?"

"Nama, no," the lad had quickly answered in Cree, and then asked: "Why you travel so quick? You run lak de Windigo was on your track." But the spirit-broken Pierre had turned away that the boy might not know his grief.

The next morning, at daybreak, they had crawled out of their robes of rabbit-skin to plunge into the driving northwester which had swept down, over night, from the wild wastes of Keewatin into the valley of the Albany. But the veteran who bore the scars of forty years of battling with the fury of the subarctic winter did not wait in camp for the storm to blow itself out. It was his last trip to Fort Hope and the mail should go through. The next long snow one of the young men might crack his whip over the Christmas mail-team, but he would need the heart and sinews of a king caribou to match the records that Pierre Grassette—known among the Fort Hope Ojibways as "Flying Feet"—had left for the long Albany trail. So, obsessed with but one thought, for three days he had forced the whining and reluctant huskies into the drive of the gale.

On the afternoon of the third day the storm ceased. Through new drifts and over ice beaten bare by the hammering of the wind, the old Spartan ran like a

white wraith in his snow-crusted capote. In the rear Esau, flicking the ear of a lagging husky with his long whip, or calling to the lead-dog, already dreamed of the good cheer that awaited them three hundred miles away at Fort Hope. In fancy he tasted the boiled salt goose and the juicy caribou steak of their Christmas dinner, and a smile lit his swarthy features as he pictured himself swinging the dusky Ojibway girls at the New Year's revelry. Suddenly the yelp of the lead-dog and the stopping of the sled roused him. Looking up he saw the huskies nosing the prostrate figure of his companion.

As Esau bent over him Pierre attempted to rise, but fell back, choking, upon the snow. The terrified boy knelt, turned back the fur-lined hood of the capote and gazed into the bloodshot eyes of his companion, who struggled painfully for breath. Supporting him in his arms, Esau held the old man, whose lean frame shook with a paroxysm of coughing. The attack ceased, but on the quivering lips of the stricken voyageur it left a deep crimson stain. Then Esau understood. Tenderly he lifted the limp body, placed it on the sled, and drove to the shore, where in the thick spruce he found a hollow sheltered from the wind. There, clearing a camp-ground with his snowshoes, he pitched their shed-tent, and close in front, so that the heat would reflect into it, built a fire. Soon revived by hot tea, Pierre whispered wearily:

"It ees better dees way dan at Albanee."

"How you feel now?" asked the lad anxiously.

"Ver' bad," was the faint answer. "My wind—

"UP DERE," HE SAID, POINTING WITH A SHAKING FINGER

ees broke." The old man was seized with a repetition of the attack, while his lean hands convulsively clutched his chest. Again the hot tea relieved him, and he continued:

"I camp here—wid de wolf. You go—on—to Hope." As he spoke, from a distant ridge the lonely howl of a timber-wolf broke the silence. The boy started as if the cry were an omen of evil, but Pierre had but one thought. "De mail—she mus' go tru," he whispered painfully.

The boy did not protest. An Indian never does at orders he does not intend to obey. There had been a rupture of blood-vessels in the lungs, a not uncommon occurrence in the North among the red runners of the Company. If it proved to be a bad hemorrhage, Pierre would die; if not, he would be able later to travel back to Albany on the sled. There was nothing to do but wait. So he fed the dogs and made soup of the pemican for the sick man.

In the morning Pierre was better. Stimulated by the hot tea and soup, he asked the boy to prop him up in his blankets, where he could trace a map of the Albany trail on the snow.

"Up dere," he said, pointing with a lean, shaking finger at his tracings, "de Ghost Riviere meet de Albanee. One sleep up de Ghost you fin' petit lac. On dees lac de Cree hunt fur. Go an' bring two man. De mail she go tru for sure."

An attack of coughing checked him; in a moment he continued: "De old man at Albanee, he feel ver' bad de mail she not go tru."

Exhausted by the effort, Pierre lay back in his blankets.

"How you keep de fire?" objected the boy. "You seek. You freeze wid no fire w'en I go, and den de wolf he get you."

But the sick man was not to be denied. So Esau cut a great pile of birch logs each of which would burn for hours, and heaped them in front of the tent, that they might be pushed easily on the fire. Harnessing the dogs, he lashed his blankets and provisions to the sled and, gripping the old man's hand, said: "I not lak to leave you alone seek. But I bring de Cree back by next sun, or I sleep in de muskeg wid de wolf."

The lad hastened to the waiting dogs, waved his whip at the prostrate figure muffled in rabbit-skins by the fire, and shouted:

"Bo'-jo'! Bo'-jo'! Pierre! I come back before two sleeps wid de Cree." But as he swung down to the river trail behind the dog-team, the boy shook his head sadly, for in his heart he felt that he had said good-bye to Pierre Grassette forever.

All that day the doomed man lay by the fire with his grief. After forty years of faithful, unquestioning service, he had failed the great Company. The factor was right; he was too old for the long trails. His place was with the squaws. But the one thought that never left him, which kept him company through the long hours as he lay alone among the silent, snow-enveloped spruces under the bitter sky, was that the mail should go through by Christmas day. There was

yet time if Esau should find the Crees who wintered on the head waters of the Ghost. To his own condition the old Stoic gave little thought. He had seen men travel on snow-shoes before until blood-vessels in the overtaxed lungs were ruptured. He might get well—there was not so much pain and he coughed less—or he might die there on the shores of the Albany, and in April, when the snow melted, the ravens would finish what the wolves and foxes had left of Pierre Grassette, voyageur of the great Company. Well, a man must die sometime, he mused, and how better than on the trail, as he had lived?

Before Esau left, Pierre had wrung from the boy the promise that, if he returned with the Crees to find him dead, he would bury him in the snow on the shore, and push on to Fort Hope with the mails. This was his one consolation.

Again, as the early dusk descended upon the valley of the great river and the first cold stars glittered above the camp in the spruce, the mournful cry of the gray wolf waked the solitude. But the figure prostrate by the fire gave no sign. Later, when the crescent moon dipped behind the far Keewatin hills, dark shapes glided stealthily to and fro in the shadows of the timber, while from out the gloom near the silent camp here and there twin balls of fire gleamed, to disappear and then to gleam again, until a shift in the wind or the crackling of the burning logs left the blackness of the enfolding forest unbroken. But the fear that kept the long watches beneath the frozen stars with Pierre Grassette was not a fear of the

skulking cowards that patrolled the dusk-filled places of the night.

On the following day there floated through the twilight to the eager ears of the sick man the faint tinkle of bells. Painfully he raised himself, where he lay, to a sitting position to hear more distinctly. Again on the biting air drifted the welcome sound.

"De Cree!" he exclaimed. "Esau fin' de Cree! De mail go tru for sure!"

Nearer came the bells; now they were turning in from the river. He tried to shout the salutation of the Crees, Quey! Quey! but his voice broke in a hoarse whisper. He wondered why they were so silent. It was not that way that men came into camp. Then the tired dogs appeared, followed by a lone figure. It was Esau.

"De Cree? de Cree?" whimpered the sick man piteously, as the boy with bowed head stood before him in silence. But Pierre knew well that the mission had been in vain.

"I follow de petit riviere till de husky can travel no more," said the boy. "Dere is no lac. I follow it clear into de muskeg."

The old man groaned in desperation.

"By Gar! Have I not camp on dat lac? It ees dere, it ees dere, one sleep toward de risin' sun from de Albanee. You have turn to de nor' up de petit creek. Dat is w'ere you lose de trail, for de Ghost cum tru by de islan'."

"I not see islan' for deep snow on de ice," protested the heart-broken lad. "De snow is dreft ver'

high. But I shoot two deer, and de stew will mak' you strong. How you feel now?"

"W'en you have sleep, you go back for de Cree," commanded Pierre, ignoring the question.

That night Esau and the huskies feasted on caribou steak, and the strong broth strengthened the old man, who had eaten little since the boy left him.

At daybreak Esau, after cutting a huge pile of firewood, again set out for the camps of the Crees. Then followed days and nights of hope and fear for the one who waited. Throughout the evening of the second day Pierre lay with ears straining to catch the tinkle of bells or the voices of the drivers. Once a faint, far call from the direction of the mouth of the Ghost brought him with bounding pulses to his elbows, only to fall back in his blankets when his trained ears recognized the hunting-cry of the snowy owl. Another day dragged by, and, with the coming of the dusk, crept the shadow of despair into the heart of the old man, for he knew that if Esau had found the Cree camps he would have returned on the second night. Either the lad had met with an accident or the Indians were not wintering on the head waters of the Ghost. They had camped there the winter before, but this was the year of the rabbit plague and they might have gone to another country, for lynxes and foxes range far at such a time. But if Esau had lost his way or had fallen and broken a leg? Even in such a case there was a chance that the boy might get back on the sled. The dogs were not wild huskies; he, Pierre, had trained them; and yet—who knew?

He recalled the winter, years ago, when the boy's father had perished with his dog-team in the Elkwan country in just such a storm as they had met on the Albany. In fevered fancy he beheld the dusky face, furrowed with lines of sorrow, and the reproachful eyes, of the lad's widowed mother back at the post. He had promised her to take care of the boy, and now he had sent him to a lingering death by freezing or starvation, in the barrens.

"It ees better," he sighed, "dat Pierre Grassette return not to Albanee."

The sun lifted above the low Ontario hills on the morning of the fourth day of Esau's absence to glisten on white-shrouded spruce and balsam surrounding a shed-tent, half buried in the deep snow, in which lay a sick man waiting for the death from freezing which the night would bring. The wood which Esau had cut would last but the day, and Pierre had not the strength to swing an axe, or to gather more. Once he managed to drag himself to the nearest trees and lop off a few branches, but he paid for the exertion with a protracted fit of coughing which so weakened him that he lay motionless for hours. As the night neared, he pushed the last logs on the fire and boiled his tea and pemican; then, whispering a short prayer to the Master whom the Oblat Fathers at Albany had taught him to reverence, he rolled himself in his blankets, and lay down by the fire to await the coming of the white death—the most merciful of the many that haunt the tepees of the children of the snows.

Swiftly the advancing gloom cloaked the camp in the spruce. Soon the freezing sky was ablaze with myriad stars. At intervals the icy shell of the great river boomed like a cannon-shot as it split under the contraction of the increasing cold. To the north, over the brooding bay, the first glow of the aurora pulsed and waned, then the ribboned lights, loosed from the horizon, writhed and coiled like snakes across the heavens. But the muffled figure in the tent by the dying fire lay motionless. For him the winter trails were ended. No more the river roads of summer would beckon his canoe.

Suddenly out of the hush there broke a faint, far call. The man by the dying fire stirred as though in a dream and again lay motionless. Once more through the soundless spaces of the night drifted the cry. The sleeper moaned as if in pain. Then clear upon the bitter air rang men's voices. Quickly the form was alert with life. Trembling with excitement, the half-frozen man cast off his blankets and rose stiffly to his feet.

"Esau fin' de Cree!" he cried. "De mail go tru! De mail go tru for sure!"

In his joy at the sound of the voices of the approaching men, he started to meet them, but, as the first jingling dog-team appeared, led by Esau and a Cree, the trembling legs of the sick man gave way beneath him, and with a feeble "Quey! Quey!" of welcome he sank to the snow at their feet.

Sinewy arms carried the limp form to the smouldering fire, where vigorous rubbing gradually restored

the circulation to the stiffened limbs. Then through the sleeping forest sang the axes of the Crees, biting deep into two huge birches, and soon where, but a short space before, a man lay freezing by a dying fire, kettles of tea and caribou haunch bubbled and steamed in the roaring flames that licked the great logs. By such slight tenure are held the lives of the dwellers in the North.

When they had eaten, Esau told his story to Pierre, who lay swathed in blankets by the fire.

"W'en I leave you," said the lad, cutting with his hunting-knife a pipeful of Company niggerhead and lighting it with an ember, "I keep dees tam to de beeg riviere at de islan' and sleep at de Cree camp on de petit lac. But I fin' de chil' and squaws alone. De men hunt deer in de muskeg country. Two boy I send to fin' dem and say I wait one sleep and den go back to de Albanee. But de squaw tell me de men not go if I do not wait. Widout dem I not lak to cum, and I have fear to wait wid you seek at de Albanee. I have hard job what to do, eh, Pierre?"

"You did well to wait," whispered the sick man.

"Yes," continued the boy; "two sleep I wait for dem. De nex' sun I hitch de dog to take de back trail, w'en de Cree cum in wid sled heavy wid meat. But dey not leave camp until I promeese de Companee fill dere tepee wid tea and flour so de squaw and chil' grow fat and laugh tru de long snow. For dees dey come."

"E-nh, yes!" broke in the older Cree in his native tongue; "for this flour and tea we go with you to that

fort above the great white-waters toward the setting sun."

"It was good t'ing we camp here dees sleep, Pierre, for you freeze soon widout fire," added Esau.

"Yes, it was good for sure," sighed the sick man, "for now de mail she go tru."

Already he had forgotten the doubt and agony of the last two days while he awaited Esau's return.

"Next sun we start for Hope," he said, as the men freshened the fire with great logs, and lay down in their robes on the bed of spruce boughs between the windbreak and the heat.

On the following day the rising sun overtook two dog-teams hurrying westward on the Fort Hope trail. Miles behind them still smouldered the camp-fire in the spruce. Ahead of the teams swung a tall Cree, breaking trail, while at the gee-pole of each sled a caribou-skin-clad driver with long dog-whip urged on the huskies. But lashed to the second sled lay the blanketed form of one whose voyaging days over white winter trails and wind-whipped lakes of summer were forever ended.

On up the great ice-bound river hurried the belated winter mail. Travelling from starlight to starlight—for the December days were passing—men and dogs, half-breed, Cree, and husky, held to a heart-breaking pace, that the rising sun of Christmas day might find them at the journey's end.

Day after day they knew no respite from the toil of trace and trail. Now, with snow-shoes for shovels, breaking through great drifts left by the heels of the

blizzard, now speeding over wind-packed snow or glare ice, they travelled into the sunset. And each day when the shadows of the northern night crept out over the white river from the timbered shores and the killing pace began to lag, the weak voice of the benumbed sick man on the sled would urge them on into the twilight. The Crees' protests that their dogs were raw with harness-sores and that they themselves needed rest were of no avail with one in whose ears still echoed the words of the factor at Albany. So leg-weary men and dogs slaved on under the stars. But at last, in camp, the torture of "mal raquette" in the stiffened legs of Esau and the Crees ceased, when the drugged sleep of exhaustion claimed them, while Pierre of the broken heart lay with his grief far into the silent night.

Through the desolate cliff country, where the river winds like a huge reptile between towering, timberless shores behind which the sun sets almost at noon; on past the thousand islands where, in summer, the trout and dore lie below a hundred silver cascades; up the great lake that the Ojibways call "The Charmed Water," where the river sturgeon breed; over three hundred miles of subarctic winter trail they toiled, that the factor at Hope might open his mail from Scotland on Christmas day, and a half-breed keep his word.

At last, on Christmas eve, as the cold moon lifted above the silhouetted spruce fringing the hills to the east of the Lake of the Elbow and flooded the white wilderness with light, two trail-worn dog-teams turned

into the shore. Soon the blows of axes on frozen birch echoed from the adjacent cliffs and the Fort Hope winter packet from Albany made camp twenty miles from its goal.

When, two days before, they had left the path of the blizzard and found the trail beyond free from drifts, Pierre, at last, knew that they would win. And, with the knowledge that they had conquered in their long battle with the snow and cold, new strength crept into his limbs and joy transformed the dauntless warrior of the wilderness trails.

As Esau helped him from the sled at their last camp tears blinded the deep-set eyes in the lean, wind-blackened face. With an exclamation of delight the old man pushed back the hood of the lad's capote and kissed him on both cheeks.

"De mail, she go tru for sure. De old man at Albanee know de mail ees safe wid de familee Grassette!" he cried, his arms around his nephew's neck.

Then he turned and gripped the hands of the smiling red men who had given so loyally of their best that his honor might remain untarnished.

"De Companee will not forget," he said as he thanked them.

Long before daylight of Christmas morning the eager Pierre roused the sleeping dogs and men. The harnesses were made gay with colored worsted and new bell-straps adjusted, that they might jingle bravely into the post as befitted the dignity of the Company's Christmas mail-team. In honor of the event Esau adorned himself with a pair of blue-cloth

leggings, gaudy with red-and-yellow embroidery, and wound his slim waist with a many-colored Company sash.

With difficulty they prevailed upon Pierre to resume his place on the sled. Thrilled with his victory, the false strength of excitement speeded the blood in his veins. But twenty miles away lay Fort Hope. He begged for his snow-shoes that the people there should not know his shame. Even the lean, harness-raw huskies—shadows of the great dogs that had left Albany and the Ghost—felt the excitement of the drivers and leaped whining into their collars at the signal for the start.

Up the lake trail, packed hard by the teams of Ojibways bound to the post for the Christmas revelry, hurried Esau, followed by the Crees. To the helpless sick man, lashed to the sled like a bag of pemican, never had winter morning seemed so beautiful. The Great Father to whom he had prayed through the dark days behind them had turned, indeed, a listening ear. Crippled and a derelict though he was, forever doomed to sit and dream of days that were done, he yet had been allowed to keep faith with the great Company. He had brought the mail through by the day appointed and it was well. Those unknown masters who lived beyond the Big Water would be pleased that Pierre Grassette had not failed them in his old age—Pierre Grassette, who had served them so gallantly in the days of his masterful youth.

But the mind of young Esau, running behind the sled, was busied with the anticipation of the hot bread

and steaming goose of the Christmas dinner, and the unbroken slumber that awaited him in the sleep-house at the post. There would be a merry week of feasting and dancing. Every Ojibway family within reach of Fort Hope would come in. Already the boy had forgotten the privations and sufferings of the Albany trail. He had won his spurs in the fiercest blizzard of a generation, over what was known among the old French *coureurs* as "la longue traverse," the bitterest winter trail from Labrador to the Barren Grounds. He straightened his shoulders with pride, but the instincts of the boy in him soon turned his thoughts to the Christmas dinner and the dusky Ojibway belles at the post.

On they travelled through the morning hours until they neared the point of spruce which conceals Fort Hope from the east. There Pierre called a halt.

"It ees not good dat Pierre Grassette ride lak a dead moose into Fort Hope. He will run in lak a man, on de raquette," he said.

In vain Esau objected. Pierre was too weak. He would bring on another hemorrhage by the exertion. It was madness. But the sick man would not be denied. It was his only wish, that he might bring the mail in for the last time as befitted a man and a dog-runner of the Company.

The buildings of the settlement lay but a few hundred yards beyond the point ahead. Perhaps, thought Esau, it would be as well to allow Pierre his own way. He might walk that far, and the boy knew well how deep would be the veteran's shame to be

carried helpless into Fort Hope on a sled. So they gave him his snow-shoes.

Supported by Esau's arm, Pierre shuffled slowly up the trail ahead of the impatient dogs which the Crees with difficulty kept from running their master down. Painfully he moved his stiff legs, uncertain from long disuse. Under the exertion and excitement his breath came in hoarse gasps. But as they neared the headland the trained muscles began to answer the iron will that drove them, and he flung off the friendly arm of Esau.

They rounded the point and a chorus of howls from the post huskies announced their coming. The Crees flung themselves upon the yelping dogs of the teams, who strained at their collars to bolt up the trail. At the sound of the tumult, from the trade-store, sleep-house, and tepees of the post rushed white men and Ojibways to greet the overdue Albany mail. Cheers of welcome mingled with the howls of the huskies. At last the Christmas mail—given up as lost in the blizzard—was in from the Big Water. Men, women, and dogs rushed to the shore to greet those already mourned as victims of the long trail. To the eager ears of the excited Esau and Pierre floated the Ojibway welcome: "Bo'-jo'! Bo'-jo!"

Pierre waved his hand, as Esau shouted in answer, "Quey! Quey!" the salutation of the Crees. The heart of the old man pounded in his breast, while the old fire inflamed his blood. The huskies, despite the blows of the Cree drivers, sprang forward upon the heels of the now delirious half-breed. Carried away

with the moment, he pushed the boy aside and, waving his hand at McKenzie the factor, whose stalwart figure he recognized in the crowd on the shore, broke into the old swing ahead of the dogs, as he had run into Fort Hope for thirty years.

The fear-stricken Esau begged the madman to remember his condition, but he could have checked a Keewatin northwester as readily as the fevered Pierre Grassette, who labored on, with his bloodshot eyes fixed on the factor, every breath torturing his lungs. Once, as his strength for a moment ebbed, he faltered; then, straightening up, he continued. Close behind a Cree clung to the leader of the mail-team, holding the yelping huskies by sheer strength. As they approached, the people of the post crowded down to the river trail. Only too well they sensed the meaning of the pace of the old voyaguer. Often before strong men had been loosed from the death-grip of the sullen winter trails, to creep into Fort Hope spent and broken.

When but a few strides separated him from the outstretched hand of the advancing factor, Pierre suddenly reeled in his tracks. Collecting himself, he again lurched forward, but before Esau could reach him, fell headlong to the trail.

Esau and the factor knelt beside the crumpled figure, shaken by a convulsion of coughing. Tenderly they raised the head of the choking man from the crimsoned snow beneath. A lean hand clutched that of the factor as Esau wiped the blood from the quivering lips. Presently the eyes of the stricken voyageur

sought McKenzie's with a look of appeal. The factor bent his head close to the ashen face distorted with suffering. Once, twice, the moving lips tried to convey what the old man struggled to articulate, when an attack of coughing checked him. Then he grew stronger and, raising himself, whispered:

"Tell—old man at Albanee—Pierre bring—mail—tru——!" and, with a deep sigh, sank into Esau's arms.

The shaggy leader of his mail-team threw back his great head with a long, mournful howl. And the dauntless spirit of Pierre Grassette, faithful servant of the great Company, even unto death, sped far on the mystic trail to the Valley of Rest.

THE VALLEY OF THE WINDIGO

THE VALLEY OF THE WINDIGO

François Hertel, outlaw, grounded his canoe on the sand beach at Ptarmigan Lake House, leaped into the water, and swung the woman in the bow to the shore. Leaving her to hold off with a whip the threatening post huskies from his own two dogs snarling defiance from the canoe, he went up to the trade-house. Entering the whitewashed log store, the tall Frenchman found Campbell, the factor, alone.

"Bon jour!" said Hertel, shaking hands.

"Good day!" coldly returned the Scotchman, eyeing the stranger with frankly curious gaze, for French trappers were rare so far north as the Ptarmigan Lake country. When Hertel offered Canadian paper money in payment for tea, sugar, and flour, the factor's interest was further aroused.

"You've come far," suggested Campbell, fingering the bill Hertel handed him.

"Yes, we travel sence June."

"Where are you headin'?"

"I t'ink I traverse dees countree for trappin'-groun'."

"Oh!" The thick eyebrows of Campbell rose.

"Ever travel this country before?"

"No, I alway' hunt de Height-of-Land countree, Saint M'rees water."

"What brought you so far north, then?" the factor quickly demanded, believing that he knew why this stranger had journeyed to the James Bay watershed, for in his desk lay a letter six months old warning the northern posts to keep a lookout for one François Hertel, wanted for murder at Coocoocache, on the Saint Maurice.

François Hertel shrugged his wide shoulders, looking Campbell fair in the eyes.

"I keel a man las' year at Coocoocache," he said quietly.

"You are François Hertel?" asked the factor, amazed at the admission.

"Yes, I keel de man who burn de cabane and tak' ma wife. Dey hunt me tru de long snow from de Saint M'rees to Grand Lac, but dey not tak' François Hertel. Dees spring I fin' her. She ees out dere wid de canoe."

Hertel pointed through the door to the shore, then turned fiercely upon the factor.

"De man I keel cum lak' de wolf in de night to tak' ma wife. W'at would you do?"

The frankness of the voyageur carried with it the aroma of truth. The factor knew men in the rough, and this one shaped up square; or else he was playing a game too subtle for the Scotchman's understanding. Still, the orders from Ottawa received in the Christmas mail were not to be lightly ignored.

"Hertel, if what you say is so, I don't blame you for getting your man and taking to the bush. But if

it leaks out to Ottawa that you are trading here, I'm in a pretty mess."

"At Ottawa I am dead man," and Hertel handed the factor a soiled envelope. Campbell took from the envelope two folded sheets of paper. On the first was written:

"On March last it was reported to the authorities at Ottawa that the body of François Hertel had been found frozen on the Abitibi Trail, by Harricanaw Crees. Pierre, the trapper, who was at Flying Post, on Grand Lac, in January, must trap his fur in the James Bay country for a year or two.

"A Friend of Pierre."

Campbell was plainly mystified. Then he opened the other note. It was dated at Coocoocache on a letter-head of the Hudson's Bay Company, and ran as follows:

"*To any Company man—*

"The bearer, François Hertel, has long been a faithful employee of the Company on the Saint Maurice. One night, a year ago, in June, his house on the island at Coocoocache was burned down. At the same time Walker, a railroad contractor with a bad record, was seen paddling from the island to the construction camp. Failing to find the body of Hertel's wife in the ruins, we believed her thrown into the river to cover the crime. Hertel returned and obtaining proof of Walker's guilt, killed him and took to the bush. Last winter Hertel met two of the Government Police, who were on his trail, starving in a blizzard on Grand Lac, and at the risk of arrest

brought them in to Flying Post. Out of gratitude, they reported at Ottawa that he had been found frozen on the Abitibi Trail, and wrote to Hertel at Coocoocache to that effect. Returning this spring to Coocoocache, Hertel found his wife, who had escaped from Walker in a canoe and been picked up by Vermilion River Crees. He leaves here for the north until the matter blows over, and carries an order on Company posts issued to Pierre Chapleau, to amount of $300.00. Please honor this order, against Coocoocache, and give him any help you can, as he is the best canoeman and hunter on the Saint Maurice. We think a good deal of him and believe him justified in what he did.

"ANDREW SCOTT, *H. B. C. Coocoocache.*
"J. MCCREADY, *H. B. C. Lost Lake.*"

"Well, if Jock McCready says you're all right, Hertel, it's good enough for me," said Campbell, returning the envelope. "I've put in some good years with old Jock at Fort Chimo and the Fading Waters. But you'll have to pass as Pierre Chapleau at the post here, and keep away when the Crees are in for the trade. It won't do to have it leak out to Rupert House that you're here."

"T'anks, Meester Cameel, I understan'," and the Frenchman gripped the factor's hand.

"Now, you'll have to hurry to cruise out good trappin'-grounds and net whitefish for your dogs."

"De free fur-countree ees far from here?"

"The best of it is; some of my Crees trap clear over on Nottaway waters. You'll have to move lively to get your shack built before the freeze-up. And mind

you keep off trapped grounds. The Crees will wipe you out if you don't."

Hertel smiled good-naturedly at the warning. He knew only too well the law of the fur-country that there shall be no trespass in another's valleys.

"Oh, by the way!" continued Campbell, "if you're not afraid of Windigo, Injun-devils, and such nonsense, there's a country over west that old Joe, my head man, can tell you about. You won't be running into any of the Crees over there; they won't go near it; they say it's full of evil spirits."

Hertel's keen face lighted with interest.

"W'ere ees dees countree?"

"It lies four or five days' travel straight west, on Harricanaw waters. The Cree name for this branch is Devil's River. I'll call Tom; he started to trap it once, but was almost scared to death and quit."

Presently a wrinkled Cree, aged in the Company's service, was smoking a pipe with Hertel and the factor.

"You know the trail to the valley of the Windigo, Tom?"

The Indian looked suspiciously at the two men, then nodded gravely.

"Good huntin'-ground? No Injun trap that valley?"

The Cree shook his head. "No Injun hunt dere for long tam; too much devil. Plentee game dere, I t'ink."

"How far is it from here?"

"Four, five sleep."

"You make a map of the trail to the Windigo valley on this paper. Pierre is going to trap it this winter."

The Cree's small eyes widened in wonder at the daring of the stranger who would winter in the dread land of evil spirits, shunned by the Ptarmigan Lake Indians for years as they would shun the pestilence. He turned to Hertel in protest.

"De Windigo, he live in dis valley; he rob trap; kill you; eat you' squaw. It is ver' bad place." Closing his eyes, the Cree shook his head and shoulders as if to blot out the evil memory of the valley of the Windigo.

"Never mind, Tom, Pierre takes the risk. He's a medicine-man in his country and has a charm for the devils. You show him how to get into the valley with this pencil and paper."

So, much against his will, old Tom proceeded to trace a crude map of the waterways through which ran the trail to the haunted valley of the Crees.

Hertel wished to lose himself—to disappear from the ken even of the fur-posts. Campbell he could trust, but to the Crees, trading at the post, must be given a wide berth. How better, he thought, than to build his shack and run his trap-lines in the forbidden country, the land no Indian would enter? As for the Windigo and devils, he had a charm for the worst of them in the bark of his 30–30. That the evil spirits of the Crees travelled on four padded feet, and their pelts would bring good prices over Campbell's counter at Ptarmigan Lake he had little doubt. Hertel had

spent his life in the Indian country and knew the Cree make-up—his superstition and childlike belief in the supernatural. The hardy Frenchman had smiled as the old Cree gravely pictured the fate that awaited him and his Marie in the far-off valley. He had more than once heard a lynx or a wolverine, called Injun-devil, fill the forest with demoniacal caterwauling that would have frozen the blood of a superstitious Indian, and later, when he found the vocalist in his trap, had terminated the nocturnal voice-culture by knocking the brute on the head with a club. For him the land of evil spirits held no terror.

The next day Hertel shoved his heavily loaded canoe from the beach at Ptarmigan Lake House, called a last bonjour to the factor, and with Marie handling the bow paddle, headed west. Day after day the voyageurs, following the Cree's map, toiled by river and lake and portage toward the Harricanaw headwaters, until at last their canoe floated on the Devil's River of the Crees. Then Hertel poled up the swift stream to its headwater lakes, where they were to net the whitefish needed for winter food for the dogs.

As they pushed up-stream between timbered hills that rolled away to the blue horizon, the woman in the bow exclaimed with delight at the beauty of the valley vistas which every turn of the river opened to their eyes. And each outburst of admiration brought a low chuckle from the stern-man toiling at his pole, as he thought how little Marie might appreciate the beauty of this land had she but known that these for-

ests bathed in the August sun held in their silent depths terrors unspeakable; that this soft valley, asleep in the spell of the northern summer, was the lair of demons insatiable and pitiless. But François Hertel was a wise man and no baiter of women, so held his tongue.

While they netted and dried whitefish at the lakes, Hertel cruised the country for a good central location for his cabin. Everywhere he found signs of game. The shores of dead-water and pond were trampled by moose which came to feed on lily-roots and water grasses at sundown. The round-toed hoof-prints of caribou trails networked the mud and moss of the muskeg beyond the valley. Along the streams mink and otter had left numberless tracks. Doubtless the hurrying feet of marauding marten, fox, and fisher would mark the first snow on the ridges. Truly the Cree trappers had given the country a wide berth, for never had the Frenchman seen such evidence of game.

Creeping south from the great bay the first September frosts roamed the valley, edging the river with the red of the willows, leaving a wake of birch ridges aflame against the sombre green of the spruce. The rising sun lifting shrouds of river mist, rolled them back to vanish on the ridges, and later died on western hills, hung with haze.

Long before the first snowfall the Hertels moved from their tent to a cabin of spruce logs, chinked with moss, flanked by a mud-mortared stone chimney. Beside it a pile of birch logs and split wood was heaped

high against the withering cold of the coming long snows.

Night after night through the October moon the geese honked south, racing the nipping winds which, following hard on the end of the Indian summer, swept the last leaves from poplar and birch. Then suddenly, between one sunset and dawn, narrows and dead-water closed tight, an icy film crept out from the lake shores, and the subarctic winter shut in upon the lone cabin in the valley of demons.

By December the snow stood three feet deep in the forest levels, and for twenty miles the traps of Hertel lay set on the ridges and along the streams. Never had he reaped such a harvest of fur. Black and silver fox, marten, otter, and mink, all had found his traps; and the pelts of two gray wolves hung on his cabin walls.

The early dusk of one December day overtook Hertel at the far end of his lines down the valley, where at a lean-to, thrown together in the fall, he passed the night once or twice a week. Already that buccaneer of the forests, the wolverine, had discovered some of his traps and robbed him of valuable fur. So with the most hated enemy of the trapper loose in the valley, only constant patrolling of his lines could save him the loss of many a prized fox and marten.

Hertel cut his wood for the night, shovelled away the new snow with a shoe, and built a hot fire at the open end of the lean-to. He threw two whitefish to the husky which drew his small sled, boiled his tea and

moose-meat, then rolled himself in his warm rabbit-skin blankets and slept.

It was a windless night, when the relentless fingers of the frost grip the timber till it snaps; when the shell of river and lake, contracting, splits with the boom of cannon, and the stars, glittering like myriad jewels, swarm the heavens. Above the black silhouette of far hills the aurora alternately glowed and died, then, in snakelike ribbons of light, streamed across the north.

Suddenly the husky, curled beside the blanketed figure by the fire, straightened, lifted his head, and sniffed the stinging air. Then, with hair bristling from ears to tail, he stood up while his shaggy throat swelled in a low rumble of warning to the one who slept.

Hertel stirred and thrust his head from the blankets.

"Qu'avez-vous? What's the matter with you?" he grumbled.

For reply the dog lifted his nose to the stars in a long howl. Thinking the husky had scented game, Hertel was again adjusting his blankets, when across the hushed valley floated a long cry, half howl, rising to a shrill scream, then dying slowly away.

Again the excited dog flung back the wolfish challenge of the husky to the unknown foe. Quieting the animal, Hertel, now thoroughly aroused, sat up in his blankets, listening intently for a repetition of the wail. Presently it was repeated, but this time farther up the valley.

The warning of the old Cree at Ptarmigan Lake flashed across his memory.

"De Windigo, he leeve een dees valley. He rob trap; kill you; eat you' squaw."

"Bon soir! M'sieu' Weendigo!" called the imperturbable Frenchman as he reached for his Winchester in its skin case, and, drawing out the rifle, threw a shell into the barrel. Hertel had little fear of the thing that waked the white valley with its unearthly cries. For if it had lungs to howl, it had lungs and heart and stomach to stop his rifle-bullet, or bleed at the thrust of his knife, and from the Roberval to the white Gatineau men knew how sure was the eye and what power lay in the right arm, of François Hertel. But, as he sat listening with straining ears, he cudgelled his brain to identify this prowler of the night. Lynx he had heard screaming like a child or a woman in agony; the wolverine, or Injun-devil, he had known to terrify superstitious French and Indian trappers by his maniacal caterwauling, and the howl of timber-wolves on a fresh trail was familiar to his ears; but this was neither lynx, wolf, nor wolverine. What could it be? Then the Cree's flouted tale of the demons of the valley returned to mock him.

For one thing he was deeply thankful—Marie, in the shack with the dog, far up the river, had not been wakened. Now, moreover, she must never know the Cree tradition of the valley or he could not leave her again alone, with this yowling thing, beast or devil, to terrify her.

Hugging his replenished fire, Hertel smoked a pipe,

wrestling with the mystery, as his dog whined and fretted beside him, then turned into his blankets.

The next morning he was swinging up the hard-packed river-trail behind his sled thinking of the hot dinner awaiting him at the shack, when the dog stopped, sniffed in the snow, then turned sharply off the trail, upsetting the sled. Running up, Hertel found the husky nosing huge tracks which crossed the sled-trail at right angles.

"Ah-hah! De Weendigo travel here, eh?" he exclaimed, studying the footprints. They were shaped somewhat like bear-tracks, with deep indentations of long claws, but larger than any bear-tracks he had ever seen, and, besides, bear were holed up for the winter. What beast, then, could have made that trail?

In the mental make-up of Hertel there was no trace of superstition. But the emotional Marie was keenly susceptible to the supernatural, and it was of her that he thought as he examined this strange trail in the snow. This thing must be kept from his wife if he wished to finish the winter in the valley.

As he shuffled through the soft snow beside the trail, one characteristic of the footprints was at once marked by his trained eyes—their shallowness. Despite his tracks, the beast was not heavy or he would have sunk deeper into the snow. Then, from the looks of the trail, he did not pick up his feet; he was a slow and lumbering traveller. The impulse to follow the tracks, run the beast down on snow-shoes with his dog, and have it out with his 30–30 was strong in the hunter; but it meant another night away from Marie,

and he was anxious to learn how it had gone with her at the shack. The unknown, beast or demon, would feel the sting of his 30–30 in good time. He would now hurry home.

The husky at the shack howled a welcome to the sled-team, but when Marie opened the door Hertel knew from the look in her eyes that she, too, had heard the cries in the night.

"Oh, François!" she said weakly, and fell to sobbing in his arms.

It had been as he feared. Toward morning the whining dog had roused her. Opening the door, she heard the wail back on the ridge. The dog rushed savagely into the spruce, but was soon scratching at the door, badly frightened. Not until daylight, when the cries ceased, would the husky again leave the shack.

"Oh, ma cherie, she don' get scare' at one leetle lucivee dat shout lak de grand beeg somet'ing? I hear heem seeng down riviere. Eet ees not'ing."

In the end, Hertel convinced his wife that she had heard merely the customary shrieking of that great northern cat with tufted ears, the lynx.

But at heart the Frenchman was worried, for the length of his trap-lines compelled his frequent absence at night from the shack, and another shock like the last would reduce Marie to a state of mind forbidding his leaving her. It was clear that the brute must be hunted down and wiped out at once. No beast, Windigo, or devil should drive François Hertel out of free fur-country like a craven Cree. This valley

belonged to the one who could hold it by fair fight or foul. The wild blood of the *coureurs-de-bois* which coursed the veins of the Frenchman was up.

Next morning Hertel started under the stars, promising to return before sunset. He was following the shoulder of a long ridge on which were set cabane traps for fisher and marten. In a few of these the bait, as usual, had lured foraging moose-birds or squirrel interlopers to their doom. Resetting the traps, he continued on until a shattered cabane with the silent witnesses in the snow about it told a story which brought from his throat a cry of rage.

The jaws of the steel trap gripped the severed fore foot of a marten, while, strewn with tufts of fur, the blood-stained snow in the vicinity was trampled by the same tracks which had crossed the sled-trail on the river.

Quickly freeing the excited husky from his harness, Hertel, fierce for revenge, abandoned his sled and took up the trail. With this plunderer loose on his trapping-grounds, his long days of toil would be thrown away. He must either kill his enemy at once or drive him from the valley. Over ridges and horsebacks, down along frozen watercourses, the pursuing trapper followed the tracks in the snow. For a space the eager husky led, but at length the long snow-shoe swing wore down the plunging dog, who sank deep at every leap, and he was content to follow in the better going of the packed trail of his master. On through the hours of the short December day toiled man and dog. If his quarry had not too long a start on him,

Hertel knew he would overhaul it in the deep snow before the dusk, for, from the spacing and the depth of the tracks, the animal was travelling slowly. Twice it had stopped to rest, leaving an impression that baffled the woodcraft of the Frenchman. If he could only, for an instant, line up his rifle-sights on this robber, he, François Hertel, would give him a " bonjour " of lead that would sicken him—evil spirit, Windigo, or furry thief—of the game of ruining the trapping of a Saint Maurice man.

Finally, in the afternoon, the trail led over the watershed ridges into a muskeg country to the south. The masked sun dipped behind western hills and dusk already hung in the thick timber, when the tracks brought weary man and dog to the edge of a wide barren. Shortly the swift northern night would close in, and he was already three hours' hard snow-shoeing from the shack.

With hood thrown back from his unbelted capote, while, even in the freezing air, the sweat coursed down the bold features, Hertel searched with narrowed eyes the silent reaches of the white barren, but in vain. He would have followed the trail deep into the moonlit night, camped on it, and taken it up at daylight, but he had promised to return to a woman who waited alone back in the valley. With a sigh he turned homeward with his dog.

In the days following he found his mink and otter traps on the streams around the headwater lakes unmolested, and reached the shack without again crossing the strange trail.

On the night of his return Hertel was pulling at his after-supper pipe, watching a piece of smoke-tanned moose-hide take the shape of a moccasin in the capable hands of Marie, when one of the dogs stood up with a low growl, hair bristling like a mad porcupine's quills. Then both huskies made for the door. Hertel sprang to the low entrance of the shack, while his wife's dark face went white with dread. Outside, the light from a frozen moon flooded the clearing in the forest. Hertel hushed the dogs, blocking the open door with his body, then waited, tense as a bow-string. Shortly, from the ridge back of the shack, drifted out over the still valley a wail, half-human, rising to a cat-like scream piercing in intensity, then slowly dying away.

The trapper closed the door, pushed aside the clamoring huskies, and seized his caribou-skin coat and fur mittens.

"Mon Dieu, eet ees le diable! Eet ees le diable!" moaned the terrified woman. "Don' leeve me, François!"

"Eet ees only de lucivee!" the man insisted as she clung to him. "He shout beeg, dees lynx, but he seeng 'noder song w'en he feel de bullet."

With such talk he strove to hearten the horror-stricken woman, but Hertel knew that the dread cry that chilled the blood of all living things that heard it was the howl of no lynx. What it was he was going up into the black spruce to find out.

"I leeve de husky and shotgun. You safe wid dem." And embracing the hysterical girl he closed the door against the dogs, who were useless in a still

hunt, stepped into the thongs of his snow-shoes, and started up the ridge.

The muscles of Hertel's face set stone-hard as he hurried in the direction from which had come the cry. To-night his enemy should not escape him. The beast was not more than a mile or two back in the " bush," and in the deep snow the trapper knew that he could give any four-footed creature in the North that much start and run him down before dawn, for no dog-runner from Lake Saint John to Flying Post on the Ottawa headwaters could take the trail and hold it from François Hertel. Beast or devil, whatever he was, he left tracks in the snow to follow. Beast or devil—and there had been enough in the last few days to sway a mind less balanced, to shake nerves less steady, than Hertel's—if it made tracks in the snow and howled at night, there was flesh and blood for his bullet and knife to find. If neither lead nor steel could tear its vitals, then Hertel was beaten. It was Windigo or demon, as the Cree had said, and he would slink out of the valley like a whipped husky. So ran the thoughts of the desperate Frenchman as he mounted the ridge.

At length he stood on the crest of the hill overlooking the frozen river-valley lit by the low moon, when the eerie wail lifted from the black forest in a creek-bottom below him.

Hertel glanced at the action of his rifle and broke into a run. As he swung swiftly through the soundless forest, ghostly shapes of snow-shoe rabbits faded before him into the white waste; a snowy

owl, disturbed in his hunting, floated off like a wraith.

He had travelled some distance when suddenly he ran into the familiar trail of the beast at the edge of a spruce swamp.

"Now," muttered the hunter, "you run lak snow-shoe rabbit, M'sieu' Weendigo, or dees tam François Hertel get you."

Fear of the hated thing was not in him. The raw lust for battle made his blood hot as he plunged forward on the trail. Again rose the cry, this time nearer. His quarry had neither scented nor heard him, for plainly he was not travelling. But already the wind had shifted and, to the chagrin of the trapper, the moon now traversed a thickening sky where the stars grew dim. Hertel cursed under his breath, for without light the tracks would be lost in the gloom of the spruce. He was following stealthily now, lifting his feet to muffle the click of his shoes, his muscles tense as springs for the swift action which sight of the beast would loose.

Finally, from the top of a hard-wood knoll, his keen eyes swept a beaver meadow some distance below, to make out, entering the thick scrub at its edge, a dark shape. The rifle flew to his shoulder. Once, twice, three times the silence was shattered; then the trapper ran as only one born in the North can run on snow-shoes. At the spot where the beast had disappeared there was no blood sign on the snow, but the lopped branch of a fir told by how little the snap-shot in the dim light of the forest had missed its mark.

THE RIFLE FLEW TO HIS SHOULDER

Plunging ahead, he took up the trail, less distinct now, in the masked light of the moon and stars. If he were to see his game again, he had no time to lose. The trail now doubled back toward the swamp, and the moon and stars were soon gone. The frenzied hunter was forced to bend low to distinguish the tracks which zigzagged through low cedar and spruce. Time and again he tripped and fell as he forced his way headlong through the brush on the flank of the swamp. Then he ran into a network of tracks leading in all directions, utterly obliterating the fresh trail he followed. The wily brute had doubled back to his starting-point that night, where his trail would be lost. The game was up.

Soon even his own back tracks were indistinguishable, so with a wide circle through the swamp the disappointed trapper turned homeward. But in his defeat there was ground for hope. He had seen the thing in the life, unmistakably; shot at it, and learned that it feared the man on its trail. Instead of raging at him with teeth and claws, or loosing upon its helpless victim the black terrors of the old Cree's tale, this Windigo, devil, or what you will, had travelled like a bull caribou for the safety of the swamp. Elated at the thought, the Frenchman laughed loudly; beast or evil spirit, it had no magic for the rifle-bullet of François Hertel. Some day luck would turn, some day a wail should rise in the valley that would wake even the sleeping bears in their dens. It would be the death-cry of M'sieu' Weendigo.

At the shack he found his wife keeping sleepless

vigil for his return. The agony of fear she had endured was plainly written on the drawn face.

"You see de Weendigo?" she gasped.

"Oua, I see heem," laughed the hardy Frenchman, taking her in his arms. "I shoot, and he run lak snow-shoe rabbit for de swamp. I mak' bad shot for de light. Eet ees only beeg lucivee. I get heem some day in de trap." And he patted her shoulders reassuringly.

Marie's travels took her no farther than her rabbit and ptarmigan snares in the neighboring forest, so she did not know that in size the tracks of the beast dwarfed those of a lynx, and he did not intend she should.

The day following Hertel beat through the swamp, but so many tracks led out of it over the watershed that he gave up all idea of immediate pursuit. Returning to the shack he overhauled two bear-traps, the steel jaws of which bristled with vicious teeth, harnessed a husky to the sled, and started for his marten cabanes across the river. There, before two of the stick houses, he buried in the snow the traps with their log clogs in the manner that he hid lynx-traps to take the pilfering wolverines that had already harassed his lines. If the night-wailer followed down this trap-line again, he would not escape the hidden steel jaws gaping under the snow. Then on a line of fisher-traps Hertel erected three log deadfalls, which would crush the life from a three-hundred-pound bear.

"Eef he got bone to break, dees weel break dem," chuckled the trapper as he turned homeward.

For a week Hertel patrolled the sleeping forests of the white valley, but neither heard his enemy nor found fresh signs. Twice he climbed the big ridge and traversed the swamp beyond, where he had lost the trail the night the moon failed him, but evidently the beast had abandoned his former haunts, for the new snow lay unmarked. Over the river the logs in the deadfalls still menaced the doomed creature that should trip them, but the yawning jaws of one of the bear-traps had closed on a young wolverine rashly entering the house of sticks which his cunning elders first would have torn to pieces gingerly from the rear, then ferreted out the bait, or eaten the animal in the sprung trap inside.

Another week of waiting passed and Hertel began to wonder if the beast had quit the country. Then, one bitter night on his return under the stars from the lakes, the familiar challenge floated faintly up the valley.

"Ah-hah! Eet ees you, mon ami?" he muttered, and quickened his stride. He had travelled for some time when the cry was repeated. The thought of Marie alone in the shack with the cowed huskies, while the skulking thing was loose in the neighboring forest, spurred him into a run. He was nearly home when again the windless night was filled with the horror of the lingering wail echoing from the hills. Now the runner on the river-trail was close enough to locate his enemy. The beast was on the ridge the trapper had prepared for him.

"By Gar!" Hertel exclaimed, in his joy at the

discovery. "I get you dees tam, M'sieu' Weendigo, for sure."

Shaking a mittened fist at the black hill across the valley, he turned up to his cabin, where he found Marie and the dogs with nerves on edge over the return of the dreaded prowler of the night.

While the Frenchman wished to give his traps and deadfalls a fair chance to catch the plunderer, the fear that the beast might avoid them and again escape hurried him through supper. Heartening the trembling Marie as best he could, he oiled the action of his Winchester and was off. With the approach of January the nights were growing increasingly bitter. Entering the stinging air, Hertel drew the fur-lined hood of his capote over his face, where his hot breath turned to ice on his mustache, and reknotted the sash at his waist. The inexorable grip of the frost was tightening on the ice-locked valley.

He climbed the ridge and waited, for the beast might leave the trap-line if he discovered that he was followed. Once Hertel heard the cry hardly a mile away, then he went to his first fisher-trap. The thief had done his work well. The trap was sprung and the bait gone. The second had been treated in the same way. At the next trap was a deadfall, and the Frenchman's heart pounded with hope as he approached. The drop-log had been tripped and lay in the snow in front of the cabane, which was torn to pieces.

The trapper cursed out loud. The cunning of the beast was uncanny. Through the brain of Hertel

there flashed a flicker of doubt. Could this after all be the work of a devil in brute shape? But the Frenchman's head was hard, and grasping his rifle he continued on.

For some time the night had been free from the voice, when, as he approached his second deadfall, the wail again rose from the lower shoulder of the ridge down the valley. But, as it lifted in volume to the maniacal scream, it ceased abruptly, as if choked off by some giant hand.

Hertel found the remaining deadfalls in similar condition to the first. The tracks on the snow told the same story. The ponderous engines of destruction had been rendered harmless from the outside by the crafty thief.

There was one hope left—the toothed jaws of steel hidden in the snow at the end of the marten line. He would go to them at once and take up the trail from there.

The cold was increasing. Deeper and deeper bit the fangs of the frost. His eyebrows and mustache were a mass of ice. Time and again all feeling left his toes under the thongs of his shoes, and he swung his gun from mittened hand to hand to keep up circulation. The boom of the riven river-ice and the snap of the timber alone violated the white silence under the star-incrusted sky.

The lone runner in the forest approached the first of his bear-traps at the marten cabanes. If the hairy thief had escaped these, little hope remained of running him down that night in this withering air which

cut the lungs like thrusts of a knife. Rounding a thicket of low spruce, Hertel sighted the trap. Like a flash the hunter dropped to his knees, cocked rifle at his shoulder. One, two, three seconds his eye held his sights lined on a black shape by the cabane. But the mass on the snow was motionless. Then, rising, Hertel stealthily moved forward, rifle ready. Suspicious, he stopped a hundred feet from the trap, peering long at the spectacle before him, then slowly shook his head. With rifle thrust forward and every nerve tense, Hertel approached the trap. Was his enemy in his power at last, or was he being lured into some fiendish ambuscade? He glanced quickly to the side and rear. There was nothing there. The shape in the snow did not stir. Then he walked deliberately to the trap.

"By Gar!"

The Frenchman stared at the hairy bulk crushed in the grip of the merciless steel jaws.

He touched the thing with his snow-shoe. It was frozen stiff.

With a wrench he turned the heavy trap and its victim over—to stare into the swart face, hideous in its grimace of death, of a Cree Indian.

THE QUEST OF NARCISSE LABLANCHE

"QUEY! Quey!" As he spoke, the bowman of the thirty-foot freighter bound up the Albany to Fort Matagami on the English River, rose to his feet, shading his eyes with a lean hand.

Up-stream, the far flash of dripping paddles in the July sun already low on Keewatin hills, marked an approaching canoe. "What is it, David?" called a bearded Scotchman from the stern of the big birch-bark, which bore on its curved bow the letters H. B. C.

"Four paddle! 'Jibway!" replied the half-breed after an interval, still watching intently the regularly repeated dip and swing of spruce blades driven by sinewy hands in the oncoming craft.

"Ojibway crew? It must be a Fort Hope boat, then," said the Scotchman. "Swing her inshore. We'll wait for 'em."

The bowman thrust forward his long paddle, and, with a turn, pried the nose of the canoe off the current, while five narrow Cree blades drove the boat sidling to the shore.

Shortly the nearing canoe, swept down-stream by the vicious lunge of its Ojibway crew, aided by the swift current, was within speaking distance.

Again the bowman called.

"Bo'-jo'! Bo'-jo'!" came the answer from many

throats, and with a few strokes the up-river canoe was alongside.

"Hello, Craig! What brings you to Albany in July? We passed your York boats yesterday homeward bound," called the factor of Fort Matagami.

"The same reason, Walter Douglas, that brought you to the Bay with your English River brigade when you belong at home—the longing for the sight of a red Scotch beard and the taste of a drop of Highland dew."

While Douglas acquainted the Fort Hope factor with the news from the outside world brought by the spring ship to James Bay, the crews, holding the canoes against the current with propped setting poles, exchanged the gossip of the fur-posts in a medley of Ojibway, Cree, and broken English. But one, a tall French-Cree, leaning on his pole behind the bowman of the Matagami boat, took no part in the chatter. As he listened, his black eyes wandered from one to another of the up-river crew. Finally, his gaze focussed momentarily on the grizzled sternman whose sharp features, and lighter color even under the tan, marked a strong strain of French blood. Presently the low sun warned the Company men of the necessity for seeking camp-grounds and the canoes parted.

The Fort Hope boat had left the freighter slowly bucking the current and was well down-stream, when the young breed in the Matagami canoe said, in Cree, to the bowman:

"The old man in the canoe from Hope—he is no Ojibway?"

"No," replied David, over his shoulder, "he is a Frenchman. He comes from Quebec."

"Why does he work at a post in the Ojibway country?"

"I don't know. He came to the Bay many snows ago."

"What is his name?"

"They call him Black Jack."

"Black Jack?" Rising to his feet, the younger man turned with an oath toward the down-river boat.

"What's the matter with you, Narcisse? Sit down!" shouted Douglas from the stern.

Ignoring the command, Narcisse Lablanche, his dark features distorted with hate, hurled curse after curse at the fast-disappearing canoe.

In wonder at this paroxysm of rage, the bowman turned to him:

"What you do, Narcisse? De 'mal-de-tête' get you?"

A parting grimace of mingled hatred and despair twisted the swart features of the frenzied youth as he turned from the boat speeding down the Albany trail. Then until the freighter swung into the shore for the night, the boiling of Albany water behind his blade as he followed the quick strokes of the bowman, or the vicious drive of his pole as he threw his weight into it, alone told of the desperation and grief that obsessed him.

As the crew unloaded the long craft preparatory to turning it over on the shore, the factor spoke to him:

"Look here, Narcisse, you stick in camp to-night and don't go trailin' down-river after that Fort Hope crowd. You can't settle any old scores on this trip. If you're missing when we break camp to-morrow, there'll be trouble. Understand?"

But the silent Narcisse had no answer for his chief. Later, when the men sprawled around the fire after supper, the tall bowman sought the sullen youth, who sat apart, head in hands, gazing moodily between narrowed eyelids at the blazing birch logs.

David sat down at his side, produced a black plug, cut with his knife a pipeful, and handed the plug to Narcisse. Lablanche took the tobacco and filled his pipe. Then the older man drew a burning ember from the fire and lighted both pipes. For a time they smoked, until the older man spat at the fire and broke the silence.

"You never see heem before, dees Black Jack?"

The face of Narcisse remained set, the beady eyes intent on the fire. From the rigid lips came no answer.

The two smoked on. Finally, after an interval, the younger man took the pipe from his mouth, expelled a cloud of smoke, and with eyes still on the fire, said slowly:

"It ees many long snows."

Again silence, until the older man ventured:

"You not lak heem?"

Slowly came the low answer: "He be dead man now, eef I know heem to-day."

"Ah-hah!" the other murmured, exhaling a mouth-

ful of smoke. Then, Indian-like, he threw out indirectly:

"He mak' some bad t'ings wid your famile?"

The stone-hard face of Narcisse Lablanche for the first time relaxed. His mouth shaped a bitter smile as he nodded.

"Oua, he mak' some leetle trouble wid my famile. Ah-hah! Some leetle trouble!" he repeated, and the deep-set eyes took on a far-away look as though the words of David had conjured a vision of pain out of the past—a cruel memory. Then he drew a sinewy hand across his brow as if to blot out the picture. "Oua," continued Lablanche, "he was so close to-day, I keel heem wid de knife." His lean fingers closed convulsively as if upon the throat of his enemy.

He rose, took an ember from the fire, and lit the pipe which had gone out. Then he resumed his seat beside the silent bowman and began, in the Cree tongue of their mothers:

"This I speak, for you were to me a father when I came to Fort Matagami. Never in the many moons we have journeyed by canoe and dog-team have you asked me what trouble eats at my heart. The stern-man from Fort Hope, some day, I will kill as the gray wolf kills the moose that is weak from age and hunger. So!" Thrusting out his right hand in a quick movement, the speaker opened and shut his fingers, following the gesture with a turn of the wrist.

"Many moons have I camped on his trail; north up the east shore of the Big Water under the white lights where the Husky sleeps in snow-tepees, and

hunts in skin canoes the long-toothed fish that breathe the air, and the seal, brother to the otter, and the great bear with fur like the snow. But I never looked on his face, for they told him I had come to find him.

"Far into the Ojibway country beyond Lac Seul, to the great Lake of the Spirit, I wandered to that fort of the Company called Norway House, but, fearing me, he had gone.

"Into the south I travelled, even to the trail over which the white man drives the iron horse fed with fire; but always, he had gone. One summer I went on the Company boat to Fort Churchill, many sleeps over the Big Water toward the setting sun, for they told me he had wintered there with the French traders. But no man knew where he had journeyed. He had travelled in a Company canoe to Lac Isle-à-la-Cross, and the crew had returned without him.

"Over the north I have followed him from the day I was strong enough to voyage in Company boat or drive the dogs. Eight long snows have drifted and vanished in the sun since I left Albany and the good Père Bisant at the mission, to search for this man. And now to-day, I found him and knew him not."

Again the tense features of the speaker knotted with pain. The man at his side smoked on. In a moment the other continued:

"He was a dead man to-day, but he has gone."

Once more David ventured: "He is a bad man; he made trouble with your famile, maybe?"

Slowly came the answer: "He killed my mother."

"Ah-hah!"

"He killed my mother, and I will find and kill him if his trail reaches into the sunset even to the great Barren Grounds."

For some time the two men sat watching the fire. Then Narcisse spoke:

"I will tell you a story.

"Many snows ago a Frenchman came to Fort Albany. His dogs were better than any the Crees had. He had credit, too, with the Company, and was a good hunter and canoeman, so the factor said who had known him in Quebec. He came from the Timiskiming country with a fine outfit—canoe, tent, traps, everything. That summer, at the mission, he married my mother, a young girl."

The speaker paused as if to control the emotion that memory roused in him, then continued:

"It was the winter of the rabbit-plague. We were camped far on the headwaters of the Drowning River. There were three of us. I had seen four summers, but there was no other child. The snow came early and was the longest in many years. Toward spring, the salt goose and dried fish were gone, and the moose and caribou had left the country. It was hard to travel, for the snow kept filling up the trails after they were hardened. Never had there been so much snow. Although my mother set her rabbit-snares for many miles around our camp, because of the plague she caught few; and the partridge and ptarmigan were starving and scarce."

Lablanche was silent for a space, then began again.

"It was the moon of the breaking of the snow-shoes.

The ice still held in the river, but the trails were too soft for travel with the sled, and besides we had eaten our dogs. We caught few fish in the net under the ice or with bait, and were slowly starving. Unless my father found moose or caribou soon, the river would open too late for us to reach Henley House.

" I was very young, but I remember, now, the look in my mother's eyes when she put me in the blankets at night. That I might eat she starved. The rabbits she snared she often hid from him, that I might have enough, for my father needed much food to give him strength to hunt. Often, when he found me eating, they quarrelled. But she loved her son and was not afraid.

"At last, one night, when he returned with no game, they talked long in the tepee by the fire. Before daylight, my father left to hunt for caribou, as he had to travel far before the sun softened the snow. Days we waited, my mother and I, living on a rabbit and a few fish."

Lablanche sat long, with his head in his hands. Then he finished his story.

" She never saw him again. His heart was rotten, like the spring ice in the lakes. After many sleeps, he crawled, half dead, into Henley House and fattened there, while his wife and child starved far on the Drowning River. She took food from herself that I might live. When the ice went out, she caught a few fish, and a rabbit now and then, but there came a sun when she was too weak to go to the snares. One night she took me in her arms and lay down in

our blankets. In the morning when I cried to her, she heard me not. I touched her face. It was cold.

" She would starve no more that her son might live. She had gone to the Happy Valley where there are no long snows and men with the hearts of wolverines, to wait for me. Later some Crees found our tepee and brought me to Henley House."

The speaker stopped, then, turning to the man at his side, said:

" He left us that he might fill his belly. We could not all reach the post, until the river opened, so he went away alone. Some day I will have his throat here in my two hands, so, and as he begs for life and chokes, I will say: 'This is for the little starved mother and the child you deserted on the Drowning River. This child you gave life, now gives you death for the woman you forgot.' "

" You do well to keel heem. He ees a ver' bad man," David said.

One afternoon, weeks later, a birch-bark was slowly poled up the rapids below Martin's Falls on the middle Albany. The lean face of the half-breed voyageur lighted with a smile as he turned a bend and recognized the buildings of the loneliest fur-post in Ontario, huddled on the high shore above the white water. Swiftly his long pole drove the light craft against the current, the practise of years making easy what would have been an impossible feat for one less skilled. Greeted at the shore by a pack of half-wild

huskies which he kicked out of his way, he climbed the path leading to the stockade and trade-house.

"Quey! Quey!" grunted the half-breed factor, surprised at the appearance of a single Company Indian at this season on the middle Albany.

"De old man from Fort Hope, he has passed on his return?" was the eager question.

"No, he's down-river still. What you doin' up here? I t'o't you were a Matagami man."

"I carry letter for old man at Fort Hope. When I reach de Albanee, I t'ink he gone by, and I come up six sleeps."

"Six sleeps? By Gar! you travel fast."

By sunrise on the following morning many a mile of racing river separated the canoe of Narcisse from the post at Martin's Falls. Three days he travelled before sighting his quest far below the mouth of the English. Then one late afternoon, beneath a flock of gray geese swinging down-stream into the far distance, he saw the flash of paddles.

"Ah-hah!" he muttered. "At last he comes to me. One sleep will see de end of dees 'malade' in de heart of Narcisse Lablanche." He turned his canoe to the shore and hid it in the thick brush. Then he waited.

It was after sundown when the Fort Hope boat came abreast of the watcher in the willows. As they followed the west shore of the wide river, seeking a camp-ground, the faces of the crew were indistinguishable, but there in the stern stood the man whom for eight years he had hunted through the wide north. The eyes of the half-breed glittered as he watched

them poling slowly against the current. His heart tortured him with its pounding.

Not a hundred yards above him they landed on the opposite shore and made camp. Where the watcher lay, the laughter of the crew, as they busied themselves with their cooking and pitched the leaking seams of the birch-bark, drifted across on the twilight air. When the dusk fell, the light of their fire against the background of spruce marked his goal to the one who had waited years for this moment.

Stars pierced the purple sky as night closed in on the restless river. Pipes were smoked and the light from the fire went low. Dark shapes passed to and fro, and finally he knew that they were rolled in their blankets.

For two hours he waited that they might lie deep in sleep when he crossed. Then, putting his canoe into the water, he paddled swiftly down-stream to the opposite shore. The river ran too strong for paddling against the current and he dared not pole, so he waded silently, drawing the canoe behind him. A hundred yards below the camp he left the boat on the beach and crept toward the sleepers. The fire was almost dead, but the waning light from the red embers threw into relief the white mosquito tent of the factor. Waiting a moment with ear strained for the breathing of the crew, he rose to his knees behind some low willows and looked. There, rolled in their blankets near the fire, they lay. But the man he sought—which was he?

Narcisse stood upright to obtain a better view, when

a snore and a groan from a sleeper dropped him flat on his chest. The " Hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo " of a gray owl held him there, scarcely breathing. A wood-mouse skimmed over the leaves. Then, like a blanket, silence fell again.

After years of fruitless search this man whom he hunted should not escape him through too much haste. The night was young; so he lay, shaken by his laboring heart as a boat by its engine.

Later he stole into the friendly depth of some young balsam that he might study the sleeping shapes. But not a face was exposed. Indian-fashion, and to escape the flies, they slept with blankets over their heads. There lay four men—three Ojibways and a Frenchman. Which was his man?

Learning nothing where he was, he began to crawl on his stomach nearer. He had his knife in his teeth now, for it was swift work and a quick flight that lay before him. No slow strangling while the terror in his victim's eyes faded into the glassy stare of death. No one should know; David would keep his secret safe at Matagami. A deep thrust home, and daylight would overtake him a day's journey down the river.

He raised his head to look at the two men who lay near him, side by side. Their moccasins were Ojibway. A Frenchman in summer would sleep in his socks. Again he circled back, and approached from the rear the remaining two sleepers. An Ojibway moccasin, poked out of a blanket, covered the foot of one. Besides, this was a large man, too large to be the one he sought.

As he lay within striking distance of the other a wave of exultation swept him. Trembling with the joy of the moment, Narcisse Lablanche forgot his danger and the long trail he had taken to reach this man. Memory gripped like fingers of steel at his throat. He saw a hollow-cheeked little mother in a tepee, on the Drowning River, feeding her son while she starved. His face set hard. His teeth bit at the blade of his knife. Closer he wormed his way to the sleeping form. He was within arm's length of his goal when the sleeper moved, groaning in his dreams. In a flash Lablanche had his knife at the muffled throat. Again the sleeper groaned, mumbling in Ojibway.

The pounding heart of Narcisse, checked, turned to ice. He became desperate. Could he have made a mistake? He must see the sleeper's face at the hazard of waking him and the whole camp.

The regular snoring was resumed. Narcisse took a position at full length by the side of his victim. If any of them waked but partially and saw him, he would be mistaken for one of the crew. A stockinged foot showed beneath the blanket. The rest wore Ojibway moccasins. It was he whom he sought.

Slowly, with great care, he began cutting a slit in the soft Company blanket which, tucked under, covered the back of the sleeper's head. If the hair was grizzled, it was his man, and he would drive the knife deep in under the left shoulder-blade, and make for the canoe.

He had cut the two sides of a flap that would expose

the hair, when the sleeper moaned and changed his position. Burying his face in his arm, Narcisse snored loudly, watching from the corner of his eye. With a grunt the man sank again in slumber. For a long while the hunter lay motionless, then he carefully turned back the flap he had cut in the blanket.

Pain stabbed his heart as his knife would have pierced that of his victim. The hair beneath was black as a crow's wing.

Dazed, and in his disappointment reckless now of the danger of being caught, he rose and carefully examined the three men he had passed by. They were all Ojibways.

Despair crushed him. The one he sought had escaped. Raising his hands to the stars, he shook his clenched fist at the Fate that so ironically thwarted him, and stole back to his canoe.

Four days later, at Albany, Père Bisant walked before his mission on the river shore, with a kindly arm across the shoulders of a tall half-breed.

"Yes, he came with the Fort Hope boat, but went to Moose in a Company canoe, and is, no doubt, headed for Timiskiming and the settlements."

"He knew that I would not let him live at Fort Hope till the long snow," said the voyageur bitterly. "I have lost him again."

"My son, when will you put this revenge from your heart, this fire that consumes you? Have I not told you these many years that the Great Father will

not forgive one who slays him who has given him life?"

"Yes, father, but the hunger and the thirst and the pain will not die. It is always here." The speaker struck his chest with clenched fist. "Always the face of that little starving mother is in my thoughts. Always those eyes, so sad, so big, look at me. I will hunt him till I can run no longer with the dogs or journey in the Company boats. I will follow his trail while this arm can strike with the knife, or these fingers sink into his throat."

"My son, from the time I taught you as a child in the mission school, I have loved you, and it grieves me that this demon still rages in your heart. I would that the man would die and give you peace."

Six years later Narcisse Lablanche, head voyageur at Fort Matagami, drove the Fort Albany winter packet around to the trade-house to get the mail-bag and his provisions for the trip. Douglas, the factor, was finishing a letter to the commissioner at Winnipeg as the courier entered the store.

"Narcisse, David's rheumatism is too bad for the Albany trail; you'll have to take the dogs through alone. I don't think the old man will be good for many hard winter trails again," said the factor, closing the mail-bag and handing it to Narcisse.

"It looks like dirty weather. You'd better take two weeks' rations. You'll likely run into a northwester."

Narcisse lashed the provision-bags, tent, and blan-

kets on the light sled, with whitefish for the dogs, and, shaking hands with the factor, shouted a "Bo'-jo'!" to the post people. Cracking his long dog-whip, he turned the team down into the river trail and was off on a swinging trot.

Except for the position of honor that he now held in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, as head Company man at Fort Matagami, time had made little change. The best bowman on the English and lower Albany River, and a hardened dog-runner, he had long been indispensable to the great Company. Having no family of his own, he sat, when at the post, in the cabin of old David, while the children of David's children crawled over him, and he shared David's tepee when they trapped together during the months the Company's service did not require them. Long since he had put from his heart the hope of finding the man who had deserted his wife and child, for the news had come to Albany years before that the Frenchman, "Black Jack" Lablanche, had been drowned in the Montreal River near Lake Timiskiming, far to the southeast toward the settlements.

Cracking his whip at the lead-dog's ears, he swung down the hard sled-trail of the English River, with pleasant anticipation of a few days at Albany with his old friend, Père Bisant, of the Oblat Mission.

Behind him fled the white miles, for his dogs were fast. At times, where the wind had beaten the snow from the ice, he rode on the sled, urging on the too willing huskies, who were as keen for the trail as a thoroughbred for the thrill of the race.

On the third day out of Matagami the Albany packet ran into the blizzard. Through the afternoon, before the snow had made deep enough for the drive and swirl of the northwester to block the trail with drifts, Narcisse forced the dogs, head on, into it. Then, when the fierce cold froze the powdery flakes into a needle-pointed scourge which beat blood from the faces of man and dogs, and the team, refusing to face the torture longer, swung round in their traces with thick-coated backs to the torment, Narcisse gave up and made camp in the spruce timber of the shore where he waited for the withering wind to spend its fury.

One afternoon, days later, the Albany mail was jingling again into the north, now floundering through white ridges, shoulder-high, now racing over the icy shell of the river, swept naked of snow by the unleashed wind. For some time the dogs had been slowly making their way behind their master, who broke trail through a long stretch of new snow. Suddenly the lead-dog threw up his muzzle and sniffed, then yelped. This action was followed by the dogs behind.

Narcisse turned, looking in the direction of their pointed noses. No tepee smoke of storm-bound traveller rose above the silent spruce forest. The dogs had caught the scent of some animal on the near shore, and were excited. There might be moose or caribou in there stalled by the blizzard. The thought of fresh meat spurred him.

Unlashing his rifle in its skin case from the sled,

he drove the team to the shore and, much against their protest, tied them with their traces to trees. In the deep, soft snow they would only hinder his hunting. Then he circled far back up-wind, hoping to strike a fresh trail. But the snow lay unmarked as the storm had left it, except by the tracks of furred creatures, who, on the previous night, had sought to break a three days' fast.

Narcisse had reached the river shore again, above his team, and was approaching, when their excited yelping broke out anew. He hurried to them and loosed their traces. On being freed the lead-dog at once ran down the shore a few hundred yards, followed by his mates, and disappeared in the spruce, where the yelping began again.

The curiosity of Narcisse was aroused. They had found something in that silent forest that had escaped him. Following their trail into the thick timber, he discovered them scratching at a tepee half buried in the snow. Out of a drift near the tent stuck the end of a sled and the webbed toe of a snow-shoe. All other signs of human habitation were obliterated by the snow.

With the shoe Narcisse hurriedly shovelled down to the tent-opening, knowing too well what horror might lie within. Tearing open the frozen caribou-skin flap, he peered inside. There, muffled in blankets, lay a body beside the dead embers of a fire. Scattered about with cooking-utensils were fragments of bones, which had been broken and boiled for their marrow.

It was a starvation camp on which he had stumbled, and not the first.

Crawling into the tepee, Narcisse turned back the blankets from the huddled body. A mat of long gray hair and beard obscured the sunken features of an old half-breed. Hurriedly he examined the body for signs of life. Detecting a faint flutter of the heart, the Company man vigorously set to work in a struggle with the white death for the life of the man he had found.

Bringing up his sled, he soon had a fire going under kettles of tea and pemican. Then he started in to rub the circulation back into the shrivelled limbs of the old breed. Soon he could distinguish the faint beating of the heart, and redoubled his efforts. For an hour Narcisse battled for the life that he barely held from snuffing out, by a hair. At length the quivering of sunken eyelids told him he would win. When he was able to get the half-conscious man to swallow some hot tea, the fight was over.

Late that night the stricken one opened his eyes and muttered a few words in Cree, then sank into a peaceful sleep. With the aid of the life-giving tea and steaming soup, Narcisse had conquered starvation and the white death.

For days the packet camped in the spruce, while the starved man was gaining sufficient strength to ride on the sled to Albany. Anxious as he was to reach the fort and his friends there, Lablanche patiently nursed the old man without regret at the delay, for of the unwritten laws of the north none is more rigidly ob-

served than that commanding the succor of those worsted by the relentless hand of nature. From Labrador to Bering Sea, while there is game for the kettle or bannocks for the pan, to ask is to be fed.

Gradually the old Indian regained his strength and began to talk. He said he had been trapping alone on the headwaters of a small river. Some time back the scarcity of game had wiped out his provisions to such an extent that he had started for Albany. On the way down-stream to the Albany River he had fallen and hurt his leg. This had prevented him from travelling, and he had been forced to eat his dogs. The last dog went before the blizzard. He was a French-Cree with relations who traded at Albany, but no living family. Starvation had completed what the strain of winter trail and summer portage had left of life and strength in his aged frame.

At length the old man was strong enough to ride on the sled, on which Narcisse had fashioned a cariole body of wooden strips lashed with caribou hide, taken from the sled of the Indian.

So one January afternoon, at dusk, the Matagami winter mail jingled up to the trade-house at Fort Albany with its human freight. Narcisse drove his team at once to the Oblat Mission below the post to turn over the invalid to his friend, Père Bisant.

At the door of the mission stood the bearded priest awaiting them.

"My son, it gladdens my heart to see you," cried the father in Cree, gripping Narcisse's hand. "We

feared for you when the northwester struck in. A dog-team was to go up-river to look for you in a day or two. But what have you here?" the priest asked, peering into the dusk at the blanketed form on the sled.

"Old Indian, starved out, father," replied the courier. "He was too weak to travel." Then under his breath: "He is a very old man, and I think will take the long trail soon."

"Take him into the hospital, my son; we have two there who were brought in yesterday."

Narcisse unlashed his passenger and carried him into the log hospital of the Oblat Mission, where two lay brothers took the old man and placed him in a bunk by the roaring stove.

Then the voice of Père Bisant called Lablanche to the priest's private room.

"Come to me, my son, that I may look at your face in the light. It is indeed good to see you again, straight and strong as ever. It is many moons since you were at Albany." He spoke in Cree.

"Yes, father, and your face shows much worry for your children, while the snow falls thick upon your brow."

"My cares are many. The winter has been lean for my people, and word has come that already there are many starvation camps on the Elkwan. But, come, let us look to your man; what is his name?"

"He told me his French name was Joe Brazeau," said Narcisse, following Père Bisant into the bunk-room.

The old man lay asleep where the light from a large lantern fell full on his face. Seating himself on the cot, the priest pushed back the tangled gray hair from the emaciated features. He looked long at the famine-pinched face. Presently he turned as if to speak to Lablanche, who stood with back toward him warming his hands at the stove. For a moment Père Bisant sat deep in thought, then he hurriedly exposed the neck of the sleeping man. A long scar crossed the left collar-bone. Again the priest carefully examined the face before him.

"Come!" he commanded, rising and moving to the door, his dark eyes strangely bright. When they were alone in the priest's room, Père Bisant took the astonished Lablanche into his arms. "My son," he cried, "at last my prayers are answered. You have put the demon from your heart."

The half-breed held the priest at arm's length.

"What words do you spik, father?"

"Mock me not, my son. I have loved you since I taught you as a child here at Albany. And when you went into the north, seeking one you would destroy, it grieved me much. But now ——"

"By Gar! What you say?" The perplexed Narcisse trembled with a great fear that suddenly swept him.

It was the priest's turn to be amazed. "Do you not know?" he asked.

"Oh, no! No!" groaned the one to whom the light was coming as a knife comes to the breast. "Dat ole

man in dere, eet ees not he. He were drown' long ago, long ago. No! No! Eet ees not he!"

Narcisse buried his face on the priest's shoulder.

A great disappointment made heavy the heart of Père Bisant as he sighed: "And you did not know, my son, who this man was?"

"I nevaire see heem but one tam in all dese year I hunt for heem."

As he finished, Narcisse strode to the room where the man he had saved slept. Fearing his intentions, the priest followed. With face picturing the hate that was in his breast, the half-breed stood with clenched hands menacing the man who had left his wife and child to a wilderness death that he might live. Then the priest led him away.

Late that night they sat and talked—the priest and the victim of fate's irony. The good medicine of this kindly physician of souls was working its cure at last. The wound in the heart of the sufferer, open and raw for years, had begun to heal.

As they parted the priest said: "Remember, my son, she once loved you both. She would have it as it is. From the Happy Valley where she looks out to-night, she sees you together here, and is glad. Yes, she would have it so."

Long alone sat Narcisse after his friend left him. Many and far trails he travelled in memory; from a lone tepee on the Drowning River, north up the east coast, where the white lights veil the stars; south to

the iron rails; west where the sun sets in the great barrens. Over these his fancy hurried him by phantom dog-team and canoe, always seeking one who eluded him. Again he lived through the torture of those goalless years as he pursued his quest. Twice in the night, when the old hate momentarily mastered the growing peace in his heart, he went to the bedside of the man he had sworn to kill. Twice the last words of the Oblat father sent him back to his vigil in the other room.

At last the vision of one in the Happy Valley conquered the bitterness. Rising, he went to the sleeping man. Stretching forth his arms, with eyes that beheld a mother and child in snow-enveloped tepee on a desolate river shore, deserted, he groaned:

"Maybe de good père spiks true. She would have eet so."

THE LAND OF HIS FATHERS

THE LAND OF HIS FATHERS

"De map lie!"

The old Ojibway turned from the slab counter of the trade-house at Jackfish Lake, a lean forefinger still resting on the engineer's map of a section of the preliminary survey for the new Transcontinental Railroad. There was a glitter in his black eyes as they met the surprised gaze of McDuff, the Scotch engineer.

"What d'you mean, David?" queried Cameron, the factor, peering over the Ojibway's shoulder at the map spread before them.

"All dees lak'," replied the old Indian, pointing to a chain of lakes along the shores of which ran a trial line for the contemplated Right-of-Way, "lie two—tree day travel to de sunset from de Flaming Riviere. Dey not flow dees way; beeg heel shut dat valley from de riviere." The speaker indicated with his finger.

"De man who mak' map; I know how he travel," the Ojibway continued. "De freezing moon was near; he was starve an' in great hurry, an' he listen to half-breed. He mak' bad map, for de half-breed lie."

The Indian drew a long breath as his narrowed eyes bored into the engineer's questioning gaze.

"You know this country pretty well, David?"

The Ojibway straightened to his full six feet. A

flicker of a smile played at the corners of his set mouth.

"Many snows I hunt dat country. My fader hunt dat country, an' hees fader. I know eet lak' I know my tepee out dere on de lak' shore."

"There ain't a lake or hill in the Kabenakagami country that David don't know," broke in the factor. "He was born there and his ancestors were born there and hunted it. You can depend on what David tells you about the Kabenakagami and Flaming River country."

The eyes of the old Ojibway softened.

"Well, the man who made this flying survey knows his business," grunted McDuff to John Gordon, his assistant, "but if he was close to the freeze-up and had to get out in a hurry, he may have guessed at these lakes flowing into the Flaming River, when he worked up his notes with the topographer. The Agricultural Survey sure made a mess of their western Ontario map, but they hardly made a compass survey and plotted a great deal by hearsay."

"I should say so," nodded Cameron; "the man who follows the Nepigon Trail to the Albany with that map will sure leave his bones in the bush. It don't show half the network of lakes you travel through, and water running two ways out of 'em at that."

The government engineer turned to old David, who had been an interested listener.

"David, I want you and your sons as guides until the freeze-up. Will you come with us?"

"To-morrow I tell you." And the erect figure of the treaty-chief of the Kabenakagami Ojibways disappeared through the door.

Later McDuff and Gordon sat smoking after-supper pipes in the factor's quarters.

"There's no doubt in your mind, Cameron, that old David is the best man you've got for our business?" asked McDuff.

"There are others trading at this post who trap the Kabenakagami country above and below David's hunting-grounds, but if your map is correct the preliminary survey runs through the country he has travelled all his life. He's the man you want and he's the most intelligent Indian that trades at this post. That's why he's treaty-chief."

"I guess you're right, but it don't seem possible that Stevens could have made such a bull on the Flaming River survey. Why, it may mean running a new line thirty or forty miles."

"I don't care," maintained the factor. "If David says your map is off, you can gamble your life that it is."

"Well, we've got to go and find out."

Down on the lake shore across the post clearing where already stood scattered tepees of Ojibways in for the spring trade, the occasional laugh of an Indian girl or yelp of a husky dog alone broke the hush of the June twilight. Each day, now, from north and east and west, would bring to the post the canoes of fur-hunters, freighted with noisy cargoes of children

and dogs, and the winter catch of pelts. Soon the trade-house would swarm with swarthy trappers, redman and half-breed, bartering fox and mink, lynx and otter, for powder, flour, and cloth, or lounging about, smoking Company niggerhead as they gossiped of winter camps and winter trails in the silent places.

Beyond the tepees, where the cleared ground rose to a miniature sand-cliff above the lake, sat a motionless figure silhouetted against the waning western light. Throughout the hours of the long twilight he had been there, as if carved from stone, chin in hands, gazing across the sleeping lake to purple western ridges. But his eyes had not seen the timbered hills of Jackfish, for they looked on a green, northern valley, where swift streams sang through forests of spruce and birch and fir, seeking lakes shimmering in the sun.

It was a valley that had been the hunting-ground of his father and his father's father. For generations, by the law of the north, it had belonged to the family of the Makwa—the bear. For forty miles none but the Makwa trapped its ridges and streams or netted its fish-filled lakes. In the Ojibway tongue it was called Gwanatch Tawadina, The Beautiful Valley, and there David had been born, and as a boy first learned to snare the ptarmigan and snow-shoe rabbit, and later hunt the moose and caribou. In the outlet of these lakes his father had taught him the art of running the white-water and poling the swift current in a birch-bark. There, as a child, he had lain when the camp was asleep, gazing in awe and wonder at the

myriad stars while he listened to the voices of the forest night. Not a spruce ridge, or swift brook, or wild meadow, with its dead water above the beaver dam where the moose came at sunset to eat the roots of lilies and the sweet grasses, but was a loved and familiar sight to the one who brooded in the dusk.

From the largest of the lakes of The Beautiful Valley, called the Lake of the Islands, lifted sheer a rocky mass crowned by a forest of ancient spruce and jack-pine. There for generations had the dead of his family found their long rest. There lay the mother of his tall sons, his father and father's father with their kinsmen, sleeping the endless sleep beneath the murmuring jack-pines and spruce of the Island of the Dead, the sacred ground of the Makwa.

The last light in the west had long since died. Deep the lake slept at his feet, mirroring the stars. Down among the tepees the voices of the women were hushed. From the opposite shore drifted the hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo, of a gray owl. But the lone figure on the cliff kept vigil far into the night with his vision.

At sunrise the government engineers with their assistants, canoemen, and packers, started north for the summer survey of the Kabenakagami section of the Transcontinental. In the bow of the big birch-bark carrying McDuff and young Gordon paddled the grizzled treaty-chief of the Kabenakagami Ojibways, David Makwa. A hundred miles north, down river to Stevens's flying survey, then months of line running east and west, seeking an easier grade among the

hills, around the swamps and along the wild rivers of the intractable wilderness, awaited them.

All summer McDuff and Gordon with their chainmen and voyageurs, red, half-breed, and white, toiled in the Ontario " bush," tormented by the forest pests, the midge, black fly, and bulldog; at times, when the packers failed to bring up their supplies, living on the fish and game of the country, in order that some day the deep voice of the Iron Horse might thunder through the solitudes of the Ontario hills.

Late in August, the trial lines having been run east to the Missinaibi section, the survey-party returned to its base cache on the Kabenakagami and pushed west. Here, in circling ridges and horsebacks, dodging lakes and bottomless muskeg, the skill of that old wheel-horse of the Transcontinental staff, Donald McDuff, was taxed to the limit to find a better grade than that shown by Stevens's trial line, or even maintain the required seventy-three feet per mile.

In the arduous toil of the past weeks the woodcraft and ability as a canoeman of old David had received the acid test at the hands of the gruff Scotch engineer, ruthless in the treatment of his men in the pursuit of his end and aim. And so great was the respect with which the old Indian came to be held that he started west from the big river as head man of the voyageurs.

In September the survey reached the Flaming River, having found no glaring mistake in Stevens's lines. Here, to the west, paralleling the stream, a succession of high ridges barred the way, requiring a wide

bend in the line either north or south. Stevens's line dipped south.

One evening in his tent, with the help of two lanterns, the chief engineer and John Gordon were comparing the Flaming River country on Stevens's map with those of the Agricultural and the Geological Survey.

"Well, I guess there's something in what that Injun says about this proposition, Gordon," rasped out McDuff at last. "This country west seems all cut up with small lakes and if the Geological survey wasn't made by blind men, it's some rough."

"Compare these lakes off here to the southwest on Stevens's survey with this map," said Gordon, pointing with sinewy finger. "They don't look much alike, do they? David told me to-day," he continued, "that we couldn't find a break in this ridge to the south for twenty miles. He says it turns and dips southwest."

"If that's so, Stevens made a bad guess then," growled McDuff.

"I got to the top of it yesterday with one of David's boys," went on Gordon, "and the glasses showed nothing but rolling horsebacks. I'm satisfied we must swing north past this big shoulder."

"Call David!" commanded McDuff.

Shortly the old Indian entered the tent.

"Mr. Gordon tells me that you've been clear to the headwater lakes of this river and that the ridge over there holds without a break for twenty miles?" queried McDuff.

David looked the engineer steadily in the eyes.

"Dees heel run many mile' to de sout', den turn wes'. You get no trail tru flat country for day travel. To de nord you get 'round een leetle piece."

"You say that the outlet of these lakes runs northwest and don't flow east into the Flaming. This map says it does. Are you lying or telling the truth?"

At the insult the Indian's breath quickened. His hands clinched convulsively as he faced the factor, but choking down his anger, he answered:

"Dees lak' run far nordwes' many day travel. Dees map ees bad map!" The veins stood out like whip-cords on the old man's temples and neck. His dark eyes blazed defiantly into those of the engineer as he hissed:

"Eet lie!"

"Well, maybe it does; maybe it does; we'll see soon enough."

The Indian's resentment was lost on the thick-skinned McDuff, who turned to the map before him, but there flashed through the brain of Gordon the impression that something more than the error of a surveying-party lay behind old David's vehemence. At Jackfish he had turned like a trapped wolverine to utter in that tragic manner the same words: "Eet lie!"

There was something behind all this, but what it was he could not guess.

Again David assured McDuff that he had been the length of the Flaming and only to the north could

they maintain the required grade for the road. When he had gone McDuff turned to Gordon.

"Well, I'm stumped. Stevens gets through this ridge not ten miles above here and he don't have to dig much either, if his altitudes are right, and David, who is about the best bushman I've ever knocked into, swears it's north, not south, we've got to swing.

"To-morrow," he continued, "you take David and an outfit and go up-river a week and see what you can find. I'll swing north. I'm inclined to think that we've stumbled upon the first bad blunder Stevens ever made. He was in here when the country was freezing up, and starved out in the bargain. That may account for it."

While the engineers still argued the pros and cons of the problem before them, a swarthy face appeared in the tent-opening.

"Meester MeecDuff, I wesh to spik somet'ing wid you," was whispered.

It was one of the half-breed voyageurs.

"Well, what d'you want? Haven't I ordered you to keep away from this tent? If you've got any kick to make, take it up with David. He's your boss!"

The half-breed waited until McDuff finished, his beady eyes wandering from the maps on the rough slab table to the faces of the white men; then he said in a low, insinuating tone:

"Eet ees about Daveed dat I spik. He lie to you. Dees heel over dere," waving his hand to the west, "a beeg river come tru, a day polin' up de Flamin'.

I have travel to de headwater. I know dees countree."

McDuff looked at Gordon. Over John Gordon swept a sense of disappointment—of regret. If the half-breed's tale was true, David, whom he trusted, whom he had made his friend in the strenuous weeks behind them, was deceiving them. If the tale was true, the Indian surely had a powerful reason for insisting that the location of the road must swing north.

That the old Indian with whom he was accustomed often at night to talk in Ojibway of the life and folklore of his people, whom he had found the whitest Indian he had ever known, should lie to them, was incredible. And yet—there were suspicious circumstances.

"You say that a river breaks through the ridge a few miles above here?" asked McDuff.

"Oua, yes? To-day I hear you have talk wid Daveed an' I cum to tell you he lie."

The half-breed seemed nervous. He turned to the tent-door and peered out into the darkness, then waited for McDuff's reply.

"When were you on this river?"

"Four—five year back. I come up here from the Kabenakagami for to hunt fur."

"Um-m." The Scotchman scratched his bearded jaw. "All right, Jean! We'll soon know who's wrong. That's all—get out!" The engineer pointed to the tent-opening.

As the half-breed left, a dark form noiselessly arose

near the rear wall of the tent and was swallowed in the gloom.

"Well, what do you think of that for half-breed jealousy of the Injun boss, or ——"

The silence of the night was broken by the sound of trampling in the brush down near the tents of the voyageurs, followed by an oath and rapid talk in the Ojibway tongue.

The two engineers hurried outside, but the camp of their men seemed hushed in slumber.

"There was somebody in the bush out there just now. Hello, down there!" McDuff bellowed. "What's all that noise about?"

Shortly one of the white chain-men appeared.

"What are y' having down there, Andrew, a row?"

"All quiet, sir, now! There was a little noise over near the Injun's tents, but no trouble. Somebody yellin' in his sleep. I looked in and they all had their heads under the blankets."

"All right, turn in, then; but I won't have any rows in this camp, understand? Report anything you see!"

"Yes, sir," and the sleepy chain-man returned to his blankets.

Next morning, when the returning supply-boats started back down-river for the Kabenakagami, the half-breed voyageur, Jean Nadeau, reported sick and asked to be sent home. Although he showed no signs of illness, he was allowed to go.

"Looks to me, Gordon," laughed McDuff, as the

canoes pulled out, "as if that half-breed who knows so much about this country got cold feet. I guess he wanted to rub it into David, and then lost his nerve."

The same day, with David and an Indian crew, Gordon started up-stream to reconnoitre the country, while his chief followed the ridge to the north on a flying survey.

Towering in the bow of Gordon's big Peterboro canoe old David piloted the craft up the quick-water of the swift river with a skill that only those born to the game possess. As they slowly bucked the current, driven by the setting-poles of David and the five voyageurs, Gordon's eager eyes followed the great ridge to the west searching for the opening that might mean a way through for the line. But in the middle of the morning, when he landed below a long stretch of white-water to get a better view-point for observation, it still loomed far to the south, hemming in the river.

"Can you pole this rapid, David?" asked Gordon.

"I pole it in small canoe, in dees boat, maybe."

"Those shores look pretty rough; where's the Indian portage?"

"Injun portage all dees water 'cross leetle lak'. You no see hill from de portage."

"I don't want to lose sight of that ridge. If you can pole it, go ahead."

There was murmuring and shaking of heads among the crew, but a few words in Ojibway from David served to reassure them, and he turned the nose of the canoe into the boilers below the white-water.

Up the first chute slowly moved the boat driven by

AGAIN AT HIS SIGNAL THE CREW THRUST THE BOAT FORWARD

the poles of the iron-backed crew—the voice of the tall bowman rising high above the roar of the waters that flung them back. Now they hugged the shore, where ran a deep channel, now shot across current, seeking a way through between ugly ledges white with foam, huge boulders over which piled high the racing torrent, and pinnacle rocks which thrust upward sharp teeth that could slash the bottom of the boat into ribbons. Here, skirting destruction to canoe and supplies by a hair, dodging an upset there by the breadth of a hand, up the rapids the voyageurs fought their way, throwing their weight onto the long spruce poles at the command of the bowman.

They had not got far into the long white-water when John Gordon regretted having made the attempt. His supplies and canoe were too valuable to be recklessly imperilled.

"I think we'd better get out of this, David, and carry around," he shouted.

"Up dere a piece we can land," replied David, leaning on his pole.

Again at his signal the crew thrust the boat forward, sometimes gaining feet, sometimes inches, on the weight of hurrying water. Then, as the bowman pried the nose of the craft off the current to avoid a rock, his pole snapped in his hands. Unable to recover his balance, he plunged head first into the rapids, while the canoe swung broadside on.

Before the crew behind regained control of the boat it was lifted and dropped on a jagged ledge; while, tossed and buffeted by eddies and cross-currents, the

Indian was swept below them, his arms clasped about his head, as a protection from the rocks.

Frantically the crew struggled with their poles, finally swinging the canoe off the ledge, then swiftly snubbed down-stream on the road they had come and landed half full of water below the rapids.

There on the shore stood David wringing out his clothes.

"Dees rapeed no good for beeg boat," he volunteered to Gordon.

"Are you hurt, David?"

"Naw, not one leetle rock bite me."

The bottom of the canoe was badly slashed and most of the flour wet. The flying survey must be made without delay. No excuses were accepted by McDuff.

"Patch her up the best you can and drop back to camp, boys," he told the crew. "David and I will take a few days' grub and strike into the bush. I want to see what the country looks like from that big hill up-river."

As Gordon spoke the eyes of the old Indian narrowed and the muscles of his lean face set hard, but he said nothing.

That night, miles above the rapids, Gordon and David sat smoking in front of their camp-fire.

"I thought you knew this river pretty well, David?" Gordon essayed after a long silence. But the Indian smoked on with eyes averted, as if he had not heard the question.

As they ate their supper, Gordon's mind had been

full of the events of the last few days. In vain he had struggled to throttle the suspicion which was steadily gaining strength—that this silent old Indian sitting there across the fire was playing a deep and subtle game. But why?

In the eastern survey lately completed they had camped together many nights on a flying reconnoissance of the country, as they were then camped. Born in a Hudson's Bay Post where his father was factor, Gordon as a boy had become familiar with the Ojibway tongue, and it was in Ojibway that he talked to David when they were alone. This knowledge of the language of his fathers had been the means of drawing out the proud old Indian as nothing else could have done, and of speedily cementing a warm friendship between white engineer and red voyageur.

Night after night they had burned much tobacco discussing the ways of the furred prowlers and horned wanderers of the Ontario forests and muskeg. David had spun many a tale of his journeys to the great salt bay of the north where the geese and duck swarm in myriads for the fall migration. Gordon had spent two years in the British Columbian Rockies and his talk of that land of summer snows and glaciers, lying far beyond the sunset, enthralled the imagination of the Indian. But for the most part it had been David who taught and Gordon who listened. The old man's knowledge of woodcraft, his many winter trails with the dog-teams and summer journeys in the boats of the Great Company through the Ontario silent places, his love of the mystic in nature,

had been a source of interest and delight upon which Gordon never ceased to draw.

And now, as he sat there by the fire, his doubts had at last crystallized into a deep suspicion of his friend. Well, a day or two would tell the story, he mused, and with a " Good-night, David," turned into his blanket.

It was the afternoon of the next day. They had climbed to a shoulder of the big hill Gordon had seen far down the river, and sat for a space smoking. North and south at their feet ran the winding valley of the Flaming River. Low hills of spruce and fir splashed with the yellow and gold of birch and poplar rolled to the eastern horizon where the pale blue of the watershed ridges of the Kabenakagami merged in a hazy sky. In places, where silver reaches of river met the yellow birch forests, the stream seemed suddenly to burst into flame.

" Now, I know how the river got its name. It looks afire down there, David!" exclaimed Gordon. " It's certainly a rare country."

" I show you one at sunset," said the old Indian, whose brooding eyes were blind to the beauty of the valley.

Then something impelled John Gordon to ask:

" David, why did you take me into that swamp yesterday and lose me? "

For an instant the Indian did not answer; then, turning, he rested his hand on his friend's knee and said in Ojibway:

" Because, one sleep ago, the face of the sun was

hidden, and when it died behind the hills the sky would not hang with the colors of the flowers of the forest over The Beautiful Valley."

"The Beautiful Valley?" Gordon's eyes widened in wonder. "What do you mean?"

"My son," continued the old chief, "the country you look upon gladdens your heart, for the great Manitou has given you eyes to see the rivers and the hills. In a little while when we stand on the bald head of this mountain above us as the sun dies in the west, you shall behold a land as fair as the Happy Hunting-Grounds that lie at the end of the last trail, for you shall look upon The Beautiful Valley."

Thrilled at the words, Gordon vaguely sensed what he was about to hear.

"One sleep ago, if you had been the Big White Boss who has no heart you would now lie in the black swamp down there and no white man would see your face again—for the black swamp keeps its dead. But you have the soul of an Ojibway; your heart loves the lone lands; your ears hear the voices of the rapids and the talking wind in the birches. To me you are as a son."

Held by the tragic face of the Indian, Gordon listened to the dramatic confession. The old man rested his saddened eyes momentarily on the valley, then faced the engineer with a gesture of hopelessness.

"But it is no good! Others would come some day and find the break in the hills and bring the Iron Trail to The Beautiful Valley. The white man is strong. It is no good!"

"You mean, David, that you have been trying to keep us out of your hunting-grounds—this valley you call The Beautiful Valley? There is, after all, a break in the hills above here?"

"Yes, my son; the map does not lie."

For Gordon the situation had cleared.

"I thought yesterday when you led me into that swamp—that you were trying to lose me," Gordon said, half to himself. Then he reached out impulsively and gripped the hand of the heart-broken old man.

"David, you know we are sent here by the government. We are ordered to find a trail for the road by the Fathers at Ottawa. If we make a bad trail, others will follow and find a good one. If I could—if I could keep the Transcontinental out of your valley, my friend, I would. You know I would do it, don't you?"

"Yes, you would help me, my son, for you have the soul of an Ojibway. You love the clean waters and the green forests. The burned lands sadden your heart."

To John Gordon the despair of the old man who stood with averted face to hide the play of emotion on his twisted features was a pitiful sight.

"You will know when we stand at sunset and look upon The Beautiful Valley, why David, a chief, has lied to the White Boss that the Iron Trail might not come to the land of the Makwa."

For a time the two sat in silence, then Gordon asked:

"You scared that half-breed Nadeau into going back with the supply-boats?"

"Yes, he knew this river. I followed him to your tent and heard what he said. Then I told him to go back with the supply-boats, for he fears the Makwa."

"And you broke your pole in the rapids and risked drowning yourself to keep us from finding the break in the hills?"

"Yes, but it was no good, no good!"

"Will McDuff find an easy grade through to the north?"

"No, there are many hills there and high; they must come this way after all."

"David, my friend, if there was a good way north, I'd try to help you. But other engineers follow us this winter on the snow. We are only a flying survey. They are sure to find the easy grade through the hills above here."

"Yes," assented the old man sorrowfully, "the white man is strong; he will find The Beautiful Valley."

At sunset they climbed to the bald brow of the mountain. Gordon followed his guide up out of the thick scrub to the rock face of the summit and stood thrilled at the panorama rolling away for forty miles to the west.

With a sweep of his long arm, David said proudly:

"Look, my son, upon The Beautiful Valley."

Flanked by high ridges to the north and south, the lower levels broken with undulating hills of jack-pine,

spruce, and fir shot with the maroon and gold of the hardwood, the hunting-ground of the Makwa faded far into the sunset. Here and there—like silver islands studding the sea of endless forest—shimmered a hundred lakes. And out of the nearest of these the bright thread of a river, now lost in emerald depths, now emerging, flashed off to the southeast.

Far at the head of the valley loomed a range of purple hills, over which in wondrous hues the sunken sun painted the canvas of the sky with magic brush. Not a blemish of burned country or barren marred the perfect whole.

Long the enchanted Gordon drank in the beauty of the picture.

"God, what a country!" he finally sighed.

"You know now why David lied?" wistfully the old man asked.

"Yes, I don't wonder you fought for it."

Then as the two watched the deepening splendor of the sunset, the Indian began:

"Often I have journeyed to the south in the boats of the Great Company. Once, many long snows ago, far by the Big Sweet Water I saw white men, like ants, cutting a wide trail through the living forests. Again, when the mail-canoe went south we met the smoke of forest-fires, so thick that it hid the sun, two sleeps from the great trail. There we found men, as many as there are midges in a swamp, digging holes in the hills like the foxes, and shooting the rocks and ledges with gunpowder, following those who went before. North and south for a day's journey stood

GORDON DRANK IN THE BEAUTY OF THE PICTURE

blackened ridges burned by the fires these men had made. Later they laid small trees on the naked earth and over them made a trail of iron that ran into the east, without end.

"And then one summer we saw the Iron Horse, fed with fire, come out of the east following the Iron Trail. And with the Iron Horse came the free-traders to barter for furs the burning water which the Great Company would not give the Indians. Here I saw Ojibways sell in one day for this devil-water their winter hunt of fur, while the women wailed in the tepees where there was no tea or flour. The young men, no longer men but slaves to the traders—and not ashamed—begged for the bad medicine that filled their veins with fire and stole their manhood. Here I looked on starvation and misery among my people brought by those who followed the Iron Trail with their camps.

"All this I saw when I journeyed far south to the Big Sweet Water.

"When I learned, two long snows ago, that the white man would make another Iron Trail, my heart was saddened. It was in the freezing moon before the last long snows that white men came to The Beautiful Valley. I was south at the post when my sons found them, so they gave them their lives."

On the old man's face was written the torture of his thoughts. Shortly he continued:

"You have the soul of an Ojibway, and understand. Look down there at those forests untouched by fire; those lakes, clean as the springs which feed

them; those hills without a scar. In that big lake far up the valley—we call it the Lake of the Islands—lie the bones of my people. For many, many long snows, since the big battle when we took the country from the Crees, it has been the home of the Makwa, and now the Iron Trail will come through the break in the hills and The Beautiful Valley will vanish. What your eyes see to-night will be hidden by the smoke of the burning forests. The thunder of the white man's powder will echo among its hills and its lakes lie befouled by the camps of the wood-choppers. And later the traders will come and corrupt my young men and women with their poisoned water.

"But it is no good. I am old and the white men are strong."

With a gesture of despair David turned his tragic eyes from the land of his fathers and covered his face with his hands.

Gordon tried to explain how the government had made laws for the building of the new road; how there were to be no forest-fires started by careless workmen; how the whiskey-trader would be banished from the Right-of-Way; but in his heart he knew that David was right. The magic of The Beautiful Valley would vanish at the coming of the Iron Trail.

Slowly the riot of pagan color faded from the western sky, and twilight followed. But not until dusk masked the valley did the watchers on the mountain stir.

In the middle of October, when the leaves of the

hardwood yellowed the floor of the forest and the first stinging winds from the north gave warning of the freeze-up, the flying survey through the land of the Makwa was completed. In the last weeks old David had seemed to Gordon, who tried to cheer him, somewhat reconciled to the inevitable, but the heart of the proud Ojibway was broken.

One afternoon the canoes of the party, having run the outlet of the lakes on their way to the break in the hills, were nearing the portage which skirted the steep cliffs of the gorge through which thundered the river. In front, in a sixteen-foot birch-bark, David paddled McDuff. Close behind, Gordon and five voyageurs followed in a Peterboro, with the remaining canoes in their wake. The large boat had already turned into the shore at the head of the rapids, when suddenly the Indian rose to his knees, and calling to Gordon, "Bo'-jo'! Bo'-jo'!" paddled like a demon out into midstream.

Off his guard, McDuff at first took it as an attempt by David to frighten him, but when the grim-visaged Ojibway, heedless of the engineer's shouts to turn inshore, drove the light canoe into the broken water toward the suck of the first chute, he knew that it was a madman who paddled in the stern. Then, for he was no coward, McDuff plunged into the river, attempting to reach a ledge jutting from the shore. But, though he fought desperately, the swimmer, together with the canoe, was swept into the flume.

Stunned by the swiftness of the tragedy moving before his eyes, Gordon fancied he saw, as the canoe

took the plunge, a smile light the swarthy face turned toward him and a hand raised in farewell as the doomed craft was sucked into the riot of wild water.

Far down the break in the hills they found the battered bodies of the drowned engineer and the Ojibway. As Gordon lifted the broken clay and looked at the face of the old chief, he knew that it had been a smile of triumph his fancy pictured lighting the dark features in that last look back at his friend. For from the face of David sorrow and despair had vanished, and in their place, was peace.

While the rest of the survey continued on down the Flaming River with the body of the chief engineer, Gordon, with David's sons, brought the old chief up the valley to the Lake of the Islands. There, on the Island of the Dead, they laid him beside his forefathers for his long sleep beneath the talking pines he loved.

Gordon stood by the grave at the head of which they had erected a cross of hewn spruce, and repeated what he could remember of the burial service. Then, in personal tribute to his friend, the engineer cut in the white wood of the arm these words, in English:

HERE LIES DAVID MAKWA, OJIBWAY CHIEF, WHO, RATHER THAN LIVE TO SEE THE IRON TRAIL DESECRATE HIS BEAUTIFUL VALLEY—CHOSE DEATH.

THE HIGH BROTHERHOOD

THE HIGH BROTHERHOOD

FROM the shoulder of a scrub-covered bluff which overhung the valley, the half-breed watched the far flash of a setting-pole wielded by a canoeman battling slowly up the swift wilderness river. The eyes of the breed narrowed, while the muscles of his lean face set hard as he followed the progress of the craft, marked solely by the play of sunlight on the dripping pole.

So they were still on his track—these men who had hunted him through the northern summer from Lac St. Jean over the Height-of-Land and deep into the fastnesses of Rupert Land. For a fortnight back he had believed his pursuers distanced, for he knew he had set them a pace into the wide North which but few canoemen had the endurance to follow. Lately he had been leisurely ascending the river, occasionally stopping to hunt and look over the country; and now, on this day, following his custom before making camp, he had climbed to a point commanding a view of the river behind him to discover to his surprise that the bloodhounds of the law were still hard on his trail.

Jean Garnier stood as if hewn from the jack-pine against which he leaned while the canoe labored in the quick water a mile down-stream. That there was but

one man poling, his trained eyes assured him; but what he could not as yet make out was whether the canoe carried a passenger.

However, that was a small matter; he was at the end of his tether; he would travel no farther. If he were to survive a winter in this country it was high time he built a shack and started smoking and drying a supply of fish and game. He had seen many game-signs in the valley, in fact had been gorging on moose-meat after a summer of semi-starvation and had intended to winter on the headwater lakes of the river. And now, here was this canoe!

Swiftly the half-breed had arrived at his decision. The coming night should decide whether he were to leave his bones in this lonely valley for the foxes and wolverines to snarl over, or shake off at last the relentless pursuit which for three months had driven him ever deeper into the trackless North.

More than once, in the past summer, he could have emptied a canoe of his enemies by a few well-aimed shots as he lay hidden on the shore; but Jean Garnier was not a cold-blooded assassin, even though the Government notices posted at Lac St. Jean branded him as murderer and outlaw. He had killed, but he had killed as any man in the North would have killed, in defense of his honor and his home. He had no regrets for the knife-thrust which had wiped out the man he found, on his return, had stolen the wife he had left on the Roberval when he went overseas as a soldier of the King. But with these unknown men whom the law had loosed on his trail he had no per-

sonal quarrel. To shoot them from ambush had not been to the taste of one who for three years had lived through the hell of German shell-fire and gas in the Ypres salient.

So the half-breed had pushed on and on, past Mistassini and Nichikun and the half-mythical Fading Waters into the labyrinth of unknown lakes and streams of the Labrador watershed, trusting to wear out the pursuit by sheer stamina and speed. And for some time he had been convinced that the parties searching for him, hardened voyageurs though they were, used up on the trail, had turned back.

But he was wrong. The Montagnais hunters, whom he had passed two weeks before at the forks, must have met a canoe of Provincial police still seeking him, and betrayed the fact that he had taken the east branch.

Twice during the summer he had looked at his pursuers over the sights of his rifle, and held his fire. Now it was his life or theirs, for he was through. He would turn and have it out.

Shortly, as the canoe swung across-stream with the channel, Garnier saw that but one man stood between him and his freedom—the freedom, if game proved scarce, to face starvation through the long snows of the winter which would soon shut in with its withering cold.

The sun had reached the ridge west of the river when the half-breed left his point of observation and

hurried down through the thick timber to his canoe cached back from the stream, to procure extra shells for his rifle. It would be simple enough to ambush this canoeman, unaware of the nearness of his quarry. So pumping a shell from the magazine into the chamber of his thirty-thirty, he stole down along the river shore. In a thicket of alders he awaited the coming of the canoe.

Time passed, but to the straining ears of the outlaw there drifted no familiar click of a pole striking the stony bed of the stream. From his ambush he could see but a short distance below him; so crawling nearer the beach, he parted the alders and looked. Before him the river opened up for a quarter-mile. But the canoe was gone.

One of two things had happened: either his man had gone ashore below the bend to make an early camp, which was unlikely, or—something had aroused his suspicions.

The half-breed raked his memory to recall having dropped anything from his canoe, which, held up in an eddy or alongshore, might have been noticed. He had always made camp back from the water, always obliterated his trail and fires, even in the last two weeks when he had fancied that the pack were no longer at his heels. At one time he had not made a fire for three days, so closely had the pursuit come to him among the islands of the great lake Mistassini. His man could not be making camp so early; something had driven him ashore; but what?

Lifting his moccasined feet like a fox on the trail

of a snow-shoe rabbit, Garnier cut back from the river, then turned down-stream. He had not travelled far when suddenly a sound from the direction of the river flattened him to the ground, ears straining, every nerve alive.

Shortly the noise was repeated. The lean face of the outlaw shaped a look of disgust. It was the unmistakable *chuck* of an axe. His caution was needless. His enemy was making camp.

Moving out to the river shore the half-breed saw, a hundred yards down-stream on the opposite bank, the hunter of men calmly boiling his kettle. Close by, his canoe lay bottom up on the beach.

It was not a long shot, but the light was going fast. He would take no chances. In the night, when the policeman slept, he would return. It would be surer then.

Garnier back-tracked up-river to his canoe, got out some stone-hard bannock, a piece of moose haunch and his frying-pan, and taking his axe, went deep into the forest. Then, because of the danger of the smoke being seen, he waited until dusk blanketed the valley before starting a fire. That night he might need all his strength, for his foe down-stream had already proved the stuff of which he was made by his very presence in that unmapped valley of Rupert Land. He alone had survived the heart-breaking pace up the white waters and over the blind portages from Mistassini to the Fading Waters, in which but few white men had ever wet a paddle. With such a foe Jean Garnier would take no chances. He would eat heart-

ily and wait for the moon to set before dropping down-stream to make an end of it.

Later on, deep in the night, a canoe crossed the river, and then, snubbed by a pole muffled with moose-hide, slid silently with the current, until at length it was turned in and left on the beach.

But not until the moon was smothered by an indigo ridge did the hunter begin the stalk. The river was low, so he chose the shore. The fretting of the swift current on stones and ledges alone marred the silence of the night. Noiseless as a lynx stalking ptarmigan, the half-breed made his way slowly down the shore, grasping his thirty-thirty in his right hand, with his left parting willows and alders where they grew close to the water. At times he entered the river and waded, to avoid making a noise in the "bush."

At last he reached the strip of beach on which lay the upturned canoe. He crouched, listening to hear the snoring of the sleeper, before he stood up behind some willows. There, near the embers of a dying fire, lay his man. Close by a rifle rested against a spruce.

The half-breed marvelled at the recklessness of this man who had thus made his camp in the open, seemingly regardless of the fact that he was hunting an outlaw who would not be taken alive.

Garnier raised his rifle and covered the blanketed form. There lay all that now stood in his way, helpless in his hands. Just a pressure of his finger, and he was a free man! He thought of the months of gruelling toil and hardship he had undergone because

of this man and his breed. Now the last of these wolves of police was out of the way.

But Jean Garnier did not crook his forefinger. Something of the instinct of the cat to play with the mouse caused him to lower his rifle. He wished to see the face of the man who had followed him six hundred miles, past the Chutes of the Fading Waters into the Labrador wastes.

Retracing his footsteps up the shore, he slowly worked around behind the camp. As he wormed his way through the thick scrub something broke the quiet of the deep night. For a moment the half-breed lay breathless. Again the sound was repeated. It was only the hoo-hoo of a gray owl hunting wood-mice in the forest across the river.

Garnier ground his teeth in disgust for not having shot his man when the chance offered. Now at any moment the owl might wake the sleeper. He must move fast. Swiftly the half-breed crawled to within a few feet of his man. The policeman slept on his back, half covered by his blanket, with the light from the stars full on his face.

Despite the stubble of beard, it was clearly the face of a young man, drawn lean with the hardships of the long trail. On one side, from cheek-bone to ear, the sleeper's face was furrowed by a deep red scar. Death had once missed him by a hair.

The half-breed was so near now that he could have touched his man with the muzzle of his rifle. The night was not cold, and the shirt of the policeman lay open at the neck, exposing his bronzed throat. Gar-

nier rose to his knees, thrusting his rifle before him, then changed his mind, and reaching back with his right hand, drew the knife in his belt. He would kill this man as he had killed the other who had made him an outlaw—as he had killed more than one enemy in that far land overseas.

He moved nearer the motionless form in front of him, and raising his right hand, gripping the knife, braced his knees for the thrust, every muscle tense as wire cable. But as he started to drive the lunge home, the eyes of Jean Garnier widened in amazement; his right arm relaxed, dropping to his side, while he stared at the neck of the one who slept so calmly on the lap of Death.

There, attached by a narrow ribbon to a small gold chain encircling the neck of the sleeping man, lay a Maltese cross of bronze.

The half-breed bent nearer to see more clearly in the dim starlight.

Yes, it was the Cross. Jean Garnier nodded his head, convinced.

He glanced at the knife in his right hand which, but for the glitter of gold in the starlight a moment before, would have been smeared with the blood of this man—this man who had done some great deed of bravery, to wear that bit of bronze there at his throat.

The left hand of Jean Garnier sought his own neck and drew from beneath the tattered shirt a duplicate of the cross at the sleeper's throat. He also had once been numbered among the high brotherhood of the brave.

Slowly the shape by the dying fire faded before his eyes, and they looked upon another land, a treeless waste tortured by three years of ruthless war. It was night, and rocket, star-shell and flare pulsed and glowed fitfully over a landscape of mud, crossed and recrossed by trench and wire, pockmarked by shell-hole and mine-crater.

Through an inferno of machine-gun and shell-fire, across the refuse and litter of the Land-of-No-Man, but the hell of all who entered it, the eyes of Jean Garnier beheld a lone figure moving slowly, carrying a burden on its back. At times it stopped for a space, to crouch in a shell-hole; then it continued, now crawling, now rising to stumble along with its load, until at last it was swallowed in the refuge of a Canadian trench.

The scene changed. A battalion of Canadian infantry was drawn up in line at a rest-camp in Flanders. Before the battalion six men stood stiff at attention. Facing them were a brigadier general, the colonel and the battalion adjutant. As the adjutant read a name from the paper in his hand, the general pinned something on the blouse of each soldier. Then the adjutant called:

"Jean Garnier!" and read from the paper: "For extraordinary heroism beyond the call of duty, in going back after a bombing raid and carrying his wounded commanding officer through heavy shell and machine-gun fire to the Canadian lines—the Victoria Cross!"

Gradually the vision faded, and the outlaw's eyes

again rested on the cross at the sleeper's neck, then fell to the bit of bronze he touched with his left hand.

Slowly he shook his head. This man, his enemy, also had come out of that blood bath of Flanders wearing the bronze badge of bravery.

The knife went back to its sheath.

Taking the policeman's rifle, Garnier crept down to the canoe. There, with stones, he propped the rifle on the beach, pointing down river. Near the gun, on a strip of sand, which he ringed with stones, the outlaw scrawled with his knife these words:

You av cros
I av cros
You brav man
Go back.

In the sand near the words he etched the outline of the Victoria Cross. Then Jean Garnier returned to his canoe and crossed the river.

At daybreak, Craig, of the Government police, rolled out of his blanket, started his fire, and, when he went to the river for water for his kettle, found strange moccasin tracks, his rifle, and the scrawl on the sand.

Craig read the scrawl, scratched his head, and instead of speedily getting out of range, calmly cooked and ate a slim breakfast, loaded his canoe, and poled out to midstream. There he did a strange thing.

Standing bareheaded, with his right hand raised to his forehead in the British salute, he faced each shore

in turn, then he waked the silence of the valley with the wild yell which on many a bloody day had blanched the face of the Hun:

" Hi, Canadians! "

Turning, the policeman paddled down-stream.

At the same time, from the willows of the river shore a swart half-breed rose and stood like a spruce, with his right hand at his forehead, until the craft of the hunter disappeared from the sight of the one no longer hunted.